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**Citation: Gillott, David James (2013) Authority, Authorship, and Lamarckian Self-Fashioning in the Works of Samuel Butler (1835–1902). [Thesis] (Unpublished)**

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**Birkbeck, University of London**

**Authority, Authorship, and Lamarckian Self-Fashioning in the  
Works of Samuel Butler (1835–1902)**

**David James Gillott**

**Submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy**

**September 2012**

## **Declaration**

I, David James Gillott, declare that this thesis is all my own work.

Signed declaration \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

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## **Abstract**

The Lamarckian thought of Samuel Butler (1835–1902) has been much observed in relation to his evolutionary works, but my thesis offers a wider ranging examination, and argues for the pervasiveness of Lamarckian ideas across the whole breadth of Butler's varied oeuvre. In his intervention into evolutionary debate, Butler differentiated between Darwinian luck and Lamarckian cunning, and I show how this distinction informs his notions of authority and authorship, and how he employs Lamarckian concepts in his attempt to fashion for himself an authoritative position as a man of letters. Via an examination of two of his earliest works on evolution, Chapter 1 demonstrates how Butler satirically subverts the argument by analogy employed by theologians Bishop Butler and William Paley, as well as by Charles Darwin, in order to highlight the dangers of logical argument as a means of establishing authority. Chapter 2 extends this critique through a consideration of Butler's more mature evolutionary works. These amount to a condemnation of what he believes to be the underhand means by which Darwin had sought to appropriate evolutionary theory as his own, without acknowledging the efforts of earlier evolutionists. Chapter 3 describes Butler's developing epistemology through the lens of his theological writings. It concludes that his epistemological trajectory is best read as a 'reconversion narrative', in which reason is subordinated to faith, and which is a necessary consequence of his evolutionary theory. In Chapter 4 I argue that Butler's writings on art constitute a 'Lamarckian aesthetics' that offers both a new reading of the Renaissance, as well as an optimistic alternative to ideas of fin-de-siècle cultural degeneration. Finally, in Chapter 5 I show how Butler's last works are the culmination of his self-fashioning as he sought to position himself favourably for posterity.



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## Acknowledgements

First of all I must thank the staff and my fellow students in the Department of English and Humanities at Birkbeck for providing such a wonderfully supportive environment during the three years of my PhD. Writing an English PhD thesis can be a lonely experience, but the programme of seminars and lectures put on by the Department, together with post-seminar pub gatherings, went a long way to help preserve some semblance of sanity. In particular, I must single out my supervisor Carolyn Burdett. In a thesis in which the word ‘professional’ tends to be used pejoratively, I make no apologies in using it in reference to Carolyn in its most positive sense. Her patience was unflagging in the many instances when it took a while for the penny to drop for me. Through no fault of hers there are many pennies still to drop, and maybe several that never will. I shall miss our monthly supervisions. I should also like to thank James Emmott for the numerous discussions in which we thrashed out some of the more recondite cruxes in the *MHRA Style Guide*. I can think of few others who share my enthusiasm for this aspect of research. Towards the end of my thesis I benefited from personal communication with Wendy Moffat and P. N. Furbank, who both helped to clarify my views on Butler’s sexuality. Erin Kimber of the Macmillan Brown Library at the University of Canterbury, New Zealand, responded promptly to my request for information regarding an obscure 1863 article in the Christchurch *Press*, which, sadly, did not make the final cut.

My PhD was funded by an AHRC Studentship for which I am grateful. In addition, I benefited from AHRC RTSG Study Visit funding for my visit to the *sacri monti* of Varallo and Varese in the hills north of Milan. This research trip went some way to explain why Butler loved this region and its art so much.

Finally, I owe a huge debt of gratitude to my parents, Arthur and Mavis Gillott. If Butler had been similarly blessed, we would never have enjoyed the horrors of domestic life with Theobald and Christina Pontifex, and *The Way of All Flesh* would never have been written in the form we now have it. In contrast to Butler’s experience, my parents have trusted me to follow my instincts throughout my life, and have been supportive in all the choices I have made. I dedicate this thesis to them.

## Abbreviations of Works by Samuel Butler

<i>AO</i>	<i>The Authoress of the Odyssey</i>
<i>AS</i>	<i>Alps and Sanctuaries</i>
<i>CD</i>	‘A Clergyman’s Doubts’
<i>DM</i>	‘Darwin Among the Machines’
<i>DOS</i>	‘Darwin on the Origin of Species: A Dialogue’
<i>E</i>	<i>Erewhon</i>
<i>EON</i>	<i>Evolution, Old and New</i>
<i>ER</i>	<i>Erewhon Revisited</i>
<i>EV</i>	<i>Ex Voto</i>
<i>FH</i>	<i>The Fair Haven</i>
<i>GK</i>	‘God the Known and God the Unknown’
<i>HH</i>	‘The Humour of Homer’
<i>LC</i>	<i>Luck, or Cunning?</i>
<i>LE</i>	‘Lucubratio Ebria’
<i>LH</i>	<i>Life and Habit</i>
<i>LL</i>	<i>The Life and Letters of Dr. Samuel Butler</i> , 2 vols
<i>NB</i>	<i>The Note-Books of Samuel Butler</i>
<i>SBR</i>	<i>Samuel Butler on the Resurrection</i>
<i>SSR</i>	<i>Shakespeare’s Sonnets Reconsidered</i>
<i>UM</i>	<i>Unconscious Memory</i>
<i>WF</i>	<i>The Way of All Flesh</i>
<i>WOW</i>	‘Was the Odyssey Written by a Woman?’

## Introduction

The scholarship on Samuel Butler abounds with commonplaces that will be familiar to any Victorianist with only even the vaguest knowledge of his writings. ‘Iconoclastic’, ‘original’, and ‘anti-Victorian’ are a few typical examples in the constellation of adjectives associated with him. The tenor of these is summed up in the sub-title of the recent collection of essays discussing his works: *Victorian Against the Grain*. As with all clichés, these descriptions of Butler contain a germ of truth, but, as my thesis will show, they can also be spectacularly wrong. In many ways, he was as conformist as iconoclastic, derivative as much as original, Victorian as much as anti-Victorian. The perceived slipperiness or self-contradictory nature of his literary personas can be detected in the oxymoronic phrases used in the titles of two of his earlier biographies: ‘Earnest Atheist’ and ‘Mid-Victorian Modern’.<sup>1</sup> Such phrases are accurate in their formal paradox, if not in the precise oppositional terms used to construct the paradox.

Another commonplace associated with Butler is that he is a neglected writer. *Samuel Butler, Victorian Against the Grain*, the 2007 critical essay collection that grew out of a 2002 seminar commemorating the centenary of his death, was the first such collection ever published. In his introduction, James Paradis observes that ‘the flow of research on Butler is currently at a low point, having dropped to a listing or two in annual research bibliographies’.<sup>2</sup> Twenty-six years before this, Thomas Jeffers similarly wrote of the ‘desuetude’ into which the study of Butler had then fallen.<sup>3</sup> Paradis is correct: a *Literature Online* search produces a list of just sixteen articles in academic journals since 2002. But Butler does turn up as the result of serendipitous foraging, in the unlikeliest places. There is, for example, a chapter on Erewhonian women in Diana Archibald’s *Domesticity, Imperialism, and Emigration in the Victorian Novel* (2002); and Butler is included as one of the ‘fifty major thinkers on education’ in the Routledge Key Guide of that title (2003). He also plays a prominent role in two recent discussions of nineteenth-century epistemology.<sup>4</sup> There was a short-lived *Samuel Butler Newsletter* published between 1978

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<sup>1</sup> Malcolm Muggeridge, *The Earnest Atheist: A Study of Samuel Butler* (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1936); Clara G. Stillman, *Samuel Butler: A Mid-Victorian Modern* (New York: Viking Press, 1932).

<sup>2</sup> ‘Introduction’, in *Samuel Butler, Victorian Against the Grain: A Critical Overview*, ed. by James G. Paradis (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007), pp. 3–18 (p. 5).

<sup>3</sup> *Samuel Butler Revalued* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1981), p. 6.

<sup>4</sup> *Domesticity, Imperialism, and Emigration in the Victorian Novel* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2002), pp. 105–34; Nel Noddings, ‘Samuel Butler, 1835–1902’, in *Fifty Major Thinkers on Education: From Confucius to Dewey*, ed. by Joy A. Palmer (London: Routledge, 2001), pp. 138–43; George Levine, *Dying to Know: Scientific Epistemology and Narrative in Victorian England* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002);

and 1986 by Williams College, Massachusetts, one of the three major archives of Butler's works.<sup>5</sup> In 1990, Hans-Peter Breuer and Roger Parsell published a 500-page annotated bibliography containing 1,462 entries up to 1988.<sup>6</sup> A Samuel Butler Project has been set up at St John's College, Cambridge, and there is to be a celebratory event marking its conclusion in May 2013.<sup>7</sup> In addition to my own thesis, there are at least two other single-author PhD theses on Butler that have been or will be submitted in 2012 in the UK.

But nevertheless, 'neglected' does seem to be an appropriate adjective. The most recent Penguin editions of Butler's two best-known novels, *The Way of All Flesh* and *Erewhon*, have introductions and notes dating back to 1966 and 1970, respectively. There is no Oxford World Classics edition of *Erewhon*, and its most recent edition of *The Way of All Flesh* was published in 1993. Scanning through the papers presented at the two main US and UK Victorian Studies Association conferences over the last three years, NAVSA and BAVS respectively, there appears to be not one whose main topic is Butler.<sup>8</sup>

In the wake of the 2007 essay collection and the 2009 Darwin Bicentenary this is surprising, but it may reflect the difficulties one encounters in any engagement with Butler's works. As my thesis demonstrates, one of the problems in writing about Butler is knowing when to take him seriously. This is not just a problem for twenty-first-century writers. Several contemporary reviewers read *The Fair Haven* (1873) as an inspirational conversion text, blind to Butler's irony (see Chapter 3). By focusing on one specific work, without considering other perspectives offered by his many voices, it is too easy to be

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Christopher Herbert, *Victorian Relativity: Radical Thought and Scientific Discovery* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001).

<sup>5</sup> The others being the British Library, London, and St John's College, Cambridge, where Butler studied between 1854 and 1858.

<sup>6</sup> *Samuel Butler: An Annotated Bibliography of Writings About Him*, ed. by Hans-Peter Breuer and Roger Parsell (New York: Garland Publishing, 1990).

<sup>7</sup> 'A Celebration of the Samuel Butler Project' <<http://www.joh.cam.ac.uk/celebration-samuel-butler-project>> [accessed 7 September 2012].

<sup>8</sup> For the eight BAVS Conferences for which programmes are available online, there have been only three papers in which Butler is a major topic: Chris Hokanson (Stanford), 'Butler, Morris and Wells: Cultural Reproduction and Transference of Memory in the Victorian Age' (2009); Sally Shuttleworth (Oxford), 'Fathers and Sons: Science and Generational Conflict in Meredith, Butler and Gosse' (2006); and Jeff Wallace, (University of Glamorgan), 'Victorian/Posthuman: Deleuze and Guattari's Samuel Butler' (2005). See 'British Association for Victorian Studies: Past Conferences' <<http://www.bavsuk.org/eventspastconf.htm>> [accessed 7 September 2012]. There were two papers on Butler presented at the 2010 British Society for Literature and Science Conference. Interestingly, given Butler's strong connections with Italy, both were given by Italians. See 'The British Society for Literature and Science: BSLS 2010 Programme' <<http://www.bsll.ac.uk/conference/bsls-2010-programme/>> [accessed 7 September 2012].

wrong-footed by Butler's irony and to draw a conclusion precisely contrary to that which he intended; or, alternatively, to confound his multivocality with discordant cacophony. The treacherous ground on which one finds oneself in Butler's works is no accident, but can lead to exasperation on the part of the reader. The very form of his works is bound up with his own mature epistemology, which, I contend, denies the existence or discoverability of an absolute univocal truth.

Quoting from Butler's unpublished 'Life and Habit, vol. 2', George Levine points out that 'Butler says, in an astonishingly anticipatory way that one can only call deconstructive, "Every proposition, nay every idea, carries within itself the seeds of its own undoing."' <sup>9</sup> Put another way, for Butler, each category includes within itself traces of its opposite. So, there is unity in diversity, life in death, mind in matter, and faith in reason. Ralf Norrman has used the term 'chiasticism' to describe this tendency in Butler's writings, from the grammatical figure 'chiasmus'. <sup>10</sup> However, given his love of music, and the fact that he uses the term himself, I believe it is more appropriate to describe this tendency in Butler's works as his 'harmonics'. This connotes a more constructive merging of opposites into a pleasing whole than either Levine's deconstruction or Norrman's chiasticism. In a notebook entry, Butler writes:

It is the fact of there being contradictions in terms, which have to be smoothed away and fused into harmonious acquiescence with their surroundings [...]. To a living being no 'It is' can be absolute; wherever there is an 'Is,' there, among its harmonics, lurks an 'Is not' [...]. Every proposition has got a skeleton in its cupboard. <sup>11</sup>

Herein lies the general difficulty in reading Butler and the source of both his irony and the formal qualities of his works. Multivocal form and ironic content go hand in hand. Apprehending this, it is no surprise to learn that so many of his texts are dialogic, from one of his earliest works, 'Darwin on the Origin of Species: A Dialogue' (1862), to the theological debates in *Erewhon Revisited* (1901) between Professors Hanky and Panky. Neither is it therefore surprising to find Butler entering into polypseudonymous debate with himself in the correspondence pages of the *Examiner* in 'A Clergyman's Doubts' (1879). Finally, an apprehension of his harmonics renders the use of a fictional split self — the older Edward Overton and the younger Ernest Pontifex

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<sup>9</sup> Levine, p. 273. The original quotation is from 'Life and Habit, vol. 2', in *The Shrewsbury Edition of the Works of Samuel Butler*, ed. by Henry Festing Jones and A. T. Bartholomew, 20 vols (London: Cape; New York: Dutton, 1923–26), XVIII: *Collected Essays, vol. 1*, 101–83 (p. 112).

<sup>10</sup> *Samuel Butler and the Meaning of Chiasmus* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1986), pp. 3–5.

<sup>11</sup> *Shrewsbury Edition*, ed. by Jones and Bartholomew, XX: *The Note-Books of Samuel Butler*, 320. Further references to this volume are given after quotations in the text and prefixed *NB*.

— as a vehicle for his autobiography in *The Way of All Flesh* (1903) more comprehensible.<sup>12</sup> Turning to his overall metaphysics, this is more accurately described as monistic dualism rather than either monism or dualism. The dualistic ontological nature of concepts, principles, or objects is indivisible: the harmonics cannot be disaggregated. Given such formal qualities, an ironic content is unavoidable.

Another problem encountered in writing about Butler is the number of other Butlers who appear in his works. Most obviously, one has carefully to delimit bibliographical searches in order to omit articles on the seventeenth-century Samuel Butler (bap. 1613–1680), also a satirist, and author of *Hudibras* (1663–78). In my first chapter, which discusses Butler’s satirical treatment of Bishop Joseph Butler’s *Analogy of Religion* (1736), I have been careful to distinguish clearly between the two Butlers. The scope for confusion is even greater in Chapter 5, which considers the *Life and Letters* of his grandfather, Dr Samuel Butler, headmaster of Shrewsbury School and Bishop of Coventry and Lichfield. At Heatherley’s Art School in London, where Butler studied for several years after his return from sheep farming in New Zealand, he was on friendly terms with John Butler Yeats, father of poet W. B. Yeats. And the most concise exposition of his theory of inherited memory is in a letter to a Mr Thomas William Gale Butler, ‘being, perhaps, the most brilliant man he ever knew’.<sup>13</sup> Finally, in *Erewhon* (1872), Butler makes an unmistakable allusion to the Gatling gun, very topical at the time, as it had been first used in the American Civil War by one Benjamin Franklin Butler.<sup>14</sup>

With the exception of his grandfather, none of these other Butlers were, as far as I am aware, near relatives, although according to his biographer and long-time companion, Henry Festing Jones, he thought there was some family resemblance between himself and Thomas William Gale Butler (*Memoir*, I, 134). Indeed, Butler explicitly denies any ancestral connection with Joseph Butler. He does, however, acknowledge the literary genealogy of *Erewhon*:

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<sup>12</sup> David Amigoni has noted Butler’s apparent ambivalence towards the dialogic form in *Colonies, Cults and Evolution: Literature, Science and Culture in Nineteenth-Century Writing*, Cambridge Studies in Nineteenth-Century Literature and Culture, 59 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 150–51.

<sup>13</sup> Henry Festing Jones, *Samuel Butler, Author of Erewhon (1835–1902): A Memoir*, 2 vols (London: Macmillan, 1919), II, 444–45; I, 134.

<sup>14</sup> In the Erewhonian civil war, the anti-machinists, ironically, invent new weapons that are so effective that ‘they extirpated every trace of opposition’. See Samuel Butler, *Erewhon*, ed. by Peter Mudford (London: Penguin, 1985), p. 196. Further references to this edition are given after quotations in the text and prefixed *E*. This edition includes the substantial additions Butler made in 1901 to the original 1872 edition. For a contemporary article describing the power of the Gatling gun and its first use in the American Civil War, see ‘The Gatling Gun’, *Bow Bells*, 31 August 1864, p. 112.



I have a great respect for my namesake, and always say that if *Erewhon* had been a racehorse it would have been got by *Hudibras* out of *Analogy*. Someone said this to me many years ago, and I felt so much flattered that I have been repeating the remark as my own ever since.<sup>15</sup>

After reading Butler's *Notebooks* (1912), Lytton Strachey noted in a letter to Virginia Woolf that 'it's odd how he resembles the author of *Hudibras*'.<sup>16</sup> A curious posthumous connection is that for the period October 1912 to September 1913, during the time Strachey wrote this letter, Virginia and Leonard Woolf were living at 13 Clifford's Inn. From 1865 until his death in 1902, Butler had lived at 15 Clifford's Inn.<sup>17</sup> There were further connections with Bloomsbury. The dedicatee of *Unconscious Memory* (1880) was Richard Garnett, librarian at the British Museum. David Garnett, Richard's grandson, was the lover of Duncan Grant and husband of Angelica, who was also the illegitimate daughter of Vanessa Bell and Duncan Grant.<sup>18</sup>

Although Butler was not aware of any familial connection with Bishop Joseph Butler, he was related by marriage to that other great eighteenth-century apologist, William Paley, whose son married a great-aunt of Butler's. This family connection has been little commented on in Butler's biographies, and indeed, as far as I am aware, only appears, without further remark, in the family history at the beginning of Jones's two-volume *Memoir* of Butler published in 1919 (I, 9). Butler never mentions it in his writings himself, but although the connection remains unspoken, Paley was one of the most important writers he studied at Cambridge, and the analogy Paley makes between the watchmaker and God in *Natural Theology* (1802) is one that Butler would subvert and secularize in his evolutionary work. Butler's cousin, and grandson of William Paley, the classical scholar Frederick Paley (1815–1888), was educated at Shrewsbury School by Dr Samuel Butler, and then at what was the Butler family college, St John's, Cambridge. In Frederick's work on Homer, he argued that the poems had been supplemented and assembled anonymously at a much later date, a theory against which Butler protested noisily in *The Authoress of the Odyssey* (1897).

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<sup>15</sup> 'Quis Desiderio...?', in *Shrewsbury Edition*, ed. by Jones and Bartholomew, XIX: *Collected Essays*, vol. 2, 103–13 (p. 112).

<sup>16</sup> *Virginia Woolf & Lytton Strachey: Letters*, ed. by Leonard Woolf and James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press; Chatto & Windus, 1956), p. 47 (1 December 1912).

<sup>17</sup> 'Where Virginia Woolf Lived in London'

<[http://www.virginiawoolfsociety.co.uk/vw\\_res.london.htm](http://www.virginiawoolfsociety.co.uk/vw_res.london.htm)> [accessed 7 September 2012].

<sup>18</sup> For a much fuller account of Butler's relationship with Bloomsbury, see William Van O'Connor, 'Samuel Butler and Bloomsbury', in *From Jane Austen to Joseph Conrad: Essays Collected in Memory of James T. Hillhouse*, ed. by Robert C. Rathburn and Martin Steinmann, Jr. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1958), pp. 257–73.

As I go on to describe in a later section of this Introduction, continuity of personal identity with one's ancestors is one of Butler's most important theories, with wide-reaching implications for his views on the nature of the author and authorship. Even though there may be no direct genealogical lineage, one nevertheless often senses in his work that the other Butlers are there for a reason, that he is in some way keen to establish literary kinship, as the *Erewhon* bloodstock analogy demonstrates, a point made by David Amigoni.<sup>19</sup> I also go on to show, through much of this thesis, how Butler came to collapse any distinction between author and text. In this context, the idea of books bred specifically to breed other books is not as whimsical as it may first appear.

Two of the best-known facts pertaining to Butler are his public quarrel with Charles Darwin two years before the latter's death, and his earlier adoption of a Lamarckian evolutionary theory. Butler believed that Erasmus Darwin, Charles's grandfather, had anticipated Lamarck's theory, so held him in high regard. He also felt that Charles had adopted Erasmus's ideas without acknowledgement, as I discuss in Chapter 2. The parallels and intersections between four generations of the Butler and Darwin families are so striking that they deserve highlighting, especially so, given Butler's theories of inherited memory and the continuity of personal identity. Butler was a generation younger than Charles Darwin, such that Robert, Charles's father, and Dr Samuel Butler, Butler's grandfather, were near contemporaries, born in 1766 and 1774 respectively; as were Thomas, Butler's father, born 1806, and Charles Darwin, born 1809. Robert Darwin was established as a physician in Shrewsbury and Charles attended Shrewsbury School from 1818 until 1825, during the period in which Dr Samuel Butler was headmaster. By this time Dr Butler had established for the school a formidable reputation in the teaching of classics, for which Charles had little interest. In a letter to F. W. Farrar, future Dean of Canterbury, Darwin writes of the public humiliation he suffered at the hands of his headmaster: 'I learnt absolutely nothing, except by amusing myself by reading and experimenting in chemistry. Dr. Butler somehow found this out and publicly sneered at me before the whole school, for such gross waste of time.'<sup>20</sup> Thus was established the first signs of antagonism between the Butlers and the Darwins. Thomas Butler wrote that Dr Samuel Butler and Robert

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<sup>19</sup> "'The written symbol extends infinitely': Samuel Butler and the Writing of Evolutionary Theory", in *Victorian Against the Grain*, ed. by Paradis, pp. 91–112 (pp. 92–93).

<sup>20</sup> 5 March 1867, *Darwin Correspondence Project* <<http://www.darwinproject.ac.uk/entry-5432>> [accessed 4 September 2012]. Further references to this resource will be abbreviated *DCP*.

Darwin ‘never had any quarrel but I don’t think they liked one another’.<sup>21</sup> In contrast, Thomas and Charles were acquaintances at both Shrewsbury and Cambridge, and spent the summer of 1828 together in Barmouth on an ‘Entomo-Mathematical Expedition’.<sup>22</sup> Although Jones suggests that they were not ‘particularly intimate’, Charles, in at least two letters, refers to Thomas affectionately (*Memoir*, I, 13). Discussing the expedition, Darwin concurs that Thomas is a ‘deuced goodnatured [fellow]’, and almost thirty years later, he still had fond memories of the summer in Barmouth.<sup>23</sup>

Butler’s initial contact with Charles was cordial. As I explain in Chapter 2, Darwin responded very positively to Butler’s 1862 ‘Dialogue’ on the *Origin of Species*, and thereafter they corresponded occasionally. Butler even visited him twice at Down in 1872. It was not until the publication in 1879 of the English translation of Ernst Krause’s biography of Erasmus Darwin, to which Charles wrote the introduction, that their very public quarrel was played out — one-sidedly by Butler — in the correspondence pages of the periodical press. Butler believed that his work had been plagiarized in the translation of Krause’s biography, and that his reputation as a writer on evolution had been impugned. Although Darwin did not respond publicly, his private language was heated, complaining that ‘Butler abused me with almost insane virulence’.<sup>24</sup>

Butler had dealings with a fourth generation of the Darwin family, Francis, son of Charles and Emma, and this relationship was amicable, the two of them dining or attending concerts together (Jones, *Memoir*, I, 256). It was Francis, in fact, who invited Butler to Down in November 1872 (*Memoir*, I, 165). Butler recalls a conversation in 1877, just before the publication of *Life and Habit*, when Francis expressed agreement with his theory of the identity of memory and inheritance. On the publication of *Life and Habit*, Butler wrote to Francis explaining that it was an attack on Darwinian evolution, and a defence of Lamarck (reprinted in *Memoir*, I, 257–60). There is no mention at all of Erasmus Darwin in *Life and Habit*, and Butler only viewed him as anticipating Lamarck when he came to write *Evolution, Old and New* in 1878. In his 1908 Address to the British Association, of which he was then President, Francis admits not only to his agreement

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<sup>21</sup> *The Family Letters of Samuel Butler: 1841–1886*, ed. by Arnold Silver (London: Cape, 1962), pp. 233–34 (p. 233) (2 March 1884).

<sup>22</sup> 2 January [1856?], *DCP* <<http://www.darwinproject.ac.uk/entry-1814>> [accessed 4 September 2012].

<sup>23</sup> [13 September 1828], *DCP* <<http://www.darwinproject.ac.uk/entry-47>>; 2 January [1856?], *DCP* <<http://www.darwinproject.ac.uk/entry-1814>> [accessed 4 September 2012].

<sup>24</sup> Charles Darwin, *Autobiographies*, ed. by Michael Neve and Sharon Messenger (London: Penguin, 2002), p. 82.

with the idea of ‘the identification of memory and inheritance’, but also to the necessary Lamarckian corollary, that acquired characteristics can be inherited.<sup>25</sup> Francis, although a supporter of Darwinian natural selection, could thus be viewed as the hereditary beneficiary of his great-grandfather’s proto-Lamarckian evolutionary ideas.

Amigoni has noted the important role Francis Darwin played in defending the family from Butler’s accusation that Charles had plagiarized the ideas of Erasmus.<sup>26</sup> This renders even more generous Francis’s recognition of Butler’s contribution to the theory of inherited memory in his 1908 President’s Address. Furthermore, he goes so far as to exculpate Butler himself from any charges of plagiarism, explaining that Butler had formulated his theory independently, before he knew of physiologist Ewald Hering’s earlier and very similar idea (Francis Darwin, p. 16). The Butler–Darwin affair was finally laid to rest in 1911 with the publication, at the joint expense of Francis Darwin and Henry Festing Jones, of *Charles Darwin and Samuel Butler: A Step Towards Reconciliation*. The proxies of both parties made concessions: Jones acknowledging that Butler was mistaken in thinking that the Krause biography of Erasmus Darwin had been written in order to undermine his authority; and Francis admitting that his father had made errors of judgment in dealing with Butler’s charge (Jones, *Memoir*, II, 427–28).

I have dwelt upon these complicated familial and common patronymic relationships to introduce and highlight the importance of inheritance to Butler’s thinking about the nature of authorship. In particular, I argue that the connection Butler makes between these two ideas — inheritance and authorship — can be employed productively in the burgeoning scholarship on Victorian life-writing. Not surprisingly, *The Way of All Flesh* has often been discussed as a seminal work of life-writing, and one that paved the way for the radical break away from hagiography and the monumental two-volume Life and Letters form, a break exemplified by the impressionistic sketches in Lytton Strachey’s *Eminent Victorians* (1918).<sup>27</sup> The novel has also been read as a dramatization of Butler’s evolutionary theories.<sup>28</sup> However, it is

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<sup>25</sup> ‘President’s Address’, in *Report of the Seventy-Eighth Meeting of the British Association for the Advancement of Science: Dublin, September 1908* (London: Murray, 1909), pp. 1–27 (pp. 15, 17).

<sup>26</sup> ‘Charles Darwin’s Centenary and the Politics and Poetics of Parenting: Inheritance, Variation, and the Aesthetic Legacy of Samuel Butler’, in *The Evolution of Literature: Legacies of Darwin in European Cultures*, ed. by Nicholas Saul and Simon J. James (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2011), pp. 73–85 (p. 79).

<sup>27</sup> See, for example, Ruth Hoberman, *Modernizing Lives: Experiments in English Biography, 1918–1939* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1987), pp. 21–24; and Max Saunders, *Self-Impression: Life-Writing, Autobiographical Fiction, and the Forms of Modern Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), p. 25.

<sup>28</sup> David Guest, ‘Acquired Characters: Cultural vs. Biological Determinism in *The Way of All Flesh*’, *English Literature in Transition, 1880–1920*, 34 (1991), 282–92.

surprising that Butler's other biographical works, such as *The Fair Haven* and the *Life and Letters* of his grandfather have not been discussed in this respect. Given his theory of the continuity of personal identity, the boundary between a biography of one's lineal ancestor and one's own autobiography becomes very blurred indeed. Moreover, given the harmonics of author and text in general, and how Butler viewed the text as embodying the mind of the author, it may be more accurate to describe his various biographies as 'psychographies', as a writing of the mind rather than of the life, of the inner thought rather than the outward action.

However, the dualities of mind-body and thought-action were others that Butler sought to harmonize. Ruth Parkin-Gounelas has written an important essay that situates Butler's understanding of the mind-body relation within late nineteenth-century debates about psychology.<sup>29</sup> She places him within the neo-associationist tradition alongside Herbert Spencer, George Henry Lewes, J. S. Mill, and Alexander Bain, whose intellectual lineage can be traced back to David Hartley, John Locke, David Hume, and Descartes. Within this tradition, she also distinguishes Butler from a dualist like Thomas Huxley who viewed states of consciousness, which, importantly for my purposes, include Lamarckian volition, as mere epiphenomena of physical, molecular changes in the brain, rather than as causal agents of action. This distinction aligns Butler with the psychophysical tradition founded by Gustav Fechner, amongst whose followers included Ewald Hering. As noted above, Hering's theory of inherited memory was remarkably similar to Butler's later theory as set out in *Life and Habit*. Volition, will, and desire are states of consciousness crucial to a Lamarckian mechanism of evolution. In the next section, I show how Butler arrived at his own Lamarckian theories of the inheritance of acquired characteristics and of the importance of use and disuse for the evolution of structure and instinct.

### **Lamarck and inherited memory**

How do we adjudicate between contradictory Gospel accounts of the Crucifixion and Resurrection? How do we identify the true author of the *Odyssey*? How can we faithfully reconstruct an episode in the young Shakespeare's life from a reading of the sonnets? These questions regarding authorship and authority Butler sought to answer concern

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<sup>29</sup> 'Mind Matters: Butler and Late Nineteenth-Century Psychology', in *Victorian Against the Grain*, ed. by Paradis, pp. 195–219.

the uncovering of the past. Analogical reasoning had been used by Charles Darwin in the *Origin of Species* (1859), Bishop Butler in the *Analogy of Religion*, and William Paley in *Natural Theology*. Similarly, Butler used analogy to infer the unknown from the known, the unknown past from the known present. Darwin began the *Origin* with a chapter on artificial selection, demonstrating how the efforts of pigeon-fanciers could select for desirable features. By analogy, he argued that natural selection, operating over vastly longer timescales, could account for the diversity of species. Bishop Butler used analogy in confronting the arguments of eighteenth-century deists. Just as there are some miraculous phenomena in the natural world that cannot be explained, such as magnetism, but are nevertheless accepted, so there are scriptural miracles that should also be accepted.<sup>30</sup> Finally, Paley made the better-known analogy between a watchmaker and God in the opening pages of *Natural Theology*.

Similarly, at the beginning of his first serious evolutionary work, *Life and Habit*, Butler draws an analogy between those skills that we acquire consciously during our lives, such as playing the piano, and those that we have acquired unconsciously, such as the ability to digest our food or to circulate our blood. There are some pianists who become so skilled as to appear unconscious of their playing. Nevertheless, there was a time when such a skilled pianist was learning their art, when their knowledge was much less, and they were conscious of what they knew. But as their knowledge increased, consciousness of it decreased. The inference drawn by Butler is that ‘the greater the familiarity or knowledge of the art, the less is there consciousness of such knowledge’.<sup>31</sup> By analogy, the perfection with which we perform natural functions such as the digestion of food or the circulation of blood is evidence that we have practised them innumerable times. But unlike piano-playing, a skill we acquire during our lives, and which we do not possess at birth, we do know how to circulate our blood or digest our food from, and even before, birth. In order to explain this, Butler argues that we have acquired this knowledge over countless generations such that we are now unconscious of it. We have thus inherited the memory of performing these functions from our ancestors. From this, it is a short step to one of the most crucial elements of Butler’s thought, and one that informs his sense of authorship: the continuity of personal identity from the single primordial cell to the present generation. If we assume that the unskilled younger

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<sup>30</sup> Joseph Butler, *The Analogy of Religion, Natural and Revealed, to the Constitution and Course of Nature*, New edn (London: Rivington, 1824), p. 198.

<sup>31</sup> *Shrewsbury Edition*, ed. by Jones and Bartholomew, IV: *Life and Habit*, 4. Further references to this volume are given after quotations in the text and prefixed *LH*.

pianist and their skilled elder self share the same personal identity, then, by analogy, we must share personal identity with all ancestors from whom we have learned the art of digestion so well that we perform the action unconsciously. I return to this notion of personal identity below, but for the moment it is necessary to describe how Butler's notion of inherited memory first brought him into conflict — ideological if not personal — with Darwin, and how he came to recognize the consonance between his own theory and that of Lamarck.

Just before finishing *Life and Habit* in 1877 Butler was alerted to two publications that bore upon his own ideas in this work. The first was Ray Lankester's recent letter in *Nature*, in which he discussed Ewald Hering's theory of inherited memory; the second was St George Mivart's *On the Genesis of Species* (1871), in which Mivart had raised objections to Darwin's theory of natural selection. Darwin had answered some of these objections in the sixth edition of the *Origin* (1872, rev. 1876), which Butler also examined.<sup>32</sup> There, he learned that Darwin dismisses the idea that most “‘instincts have been acquired by habit in one generation and then transmitted by inheritance to the succeeding generations’”, and attributes this flawed theory of inherited habit to Lamarck (*UM*, p. 25). So, for the first time, Butler learned that his own theory of inherited memory had been anticipated by Hering, which gave it a measure of authoritative support, but that conversely it had been summarily rejected as flawed by Darwin. Butler did not read Lamarck's *Philosophie Zoologique*, published in 1809, the year of Darwin's birth, until he started to write *Evolution, Old and New* in 1878. However, after reading *Genesis of Species* and the sixth edition of the *Origin*, he read some second-hand accounts of Lamarck's work and added five chapters to *Life and Habit*, in which he compares the evolutionary ideas of Lamarck and Darwin, and comes down decidedly in favour of Lamarck.<sup>33</sup>

Butler went on to read Lamarck's *Philosophie Zoologique*, as evidenced by the copious quotations he takes from it in *Evolution, Old and New*. However, like many late nineteenth-century neo-Lamarckians, he made limited use of Lamarck's ideas, the main ones being the effects of use and disuse in modifying organic structures and instincts, and the subsequent inheritance of these acquired characteristics by offspring. Butler differentiated between Darwinian and Lamarckian mechanisms of evolution via the

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<sup>32</sup> *Shrewsbury Edition*, ed. by Jones and Bartholomew, VI: *Unconscious Memory*, 23–25. Further references to this volume are given after quotations in the text and prefixed *UM*.

<sup>33</sup> For a full account of how Butler came to write *Life and Habit*, see *UM*, pp. 13–27.

terms ‘luck’ and ‘cunning’, respectively, an opposition that formed the title of his fourth evolutionary work. Like Mivart, he could not understand how, if the variations from which selection was made were random — that is, produced by luck — complex organs such as the eye, which required the co-evolution of several component parts, could evolve.<sup>34</sup> In Butler’s view, these random, non-directional variations would cancel each other out rather than accumulate, and development would not be possible.

As I go on to show in Chapter 1, Butler had made earlier use of a second analogy: that between man’s development of technology and the evolution of plants and animals. Herbert Sussman has read this analogy as set out in the ‘Book of the Machines’ chapters in *Erewhon* as a playful paradox: ‘man’s actions are as predictable as those of a machine, and yet to compare man to a machine [...] is palpably absurd.’<sup>35</sup> Sussman goes on to argue that Butler uses the machine as a ‘philosophical metaphor for the central paradox of Western philosophy, the conflict between the deterministic implications of science and the inward apprehension of volitional freedom’ (p. 155). Indeed, one could be forgiven for thinking that Butler’s belief in both the primacy of volition in evolution and the inheritance of memory are similarly self-contradictory. On the one hand our actions are determined by those of our ancestors; on the other, we have free will to fashion our own lives. However, the paradox is resolved by Butler’s conception of the continuity of personal identity. Because he believes that each individual is actually the same person as his lineal ancestors — just as an eighty-year-old man is the same person as his younger self — the actions of our ancestors by which we are constrained to act are actually our own.

The machine analogy remained undeveloped in its earliest manifestation, but by the time Butler came to write *Life and Habit*, it was used to demonstrate how absurd he felt Darwin’s theory of fortuitous variation and selection to be; and, conversely, how commonsensical was Lamarck’s theory that evolution proceeded via the volition of the organism. Thus, he can no more believe that the unique structure of the orchid, by which fertilization occurs, is not the result of self-fashioning on the part of the orchid, than he can believe that the steam engine has arisen as the result of ‘blind minute fortuitous variations’ (*LH*, p. 222). Rather, both the orchid and the steam engine have evolved by the cunning of their respective designers. In Chapter 1 I also show how

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<sup>34</sup> St. George Mivart, *On the Genesis of Species*, 2nd edn (London: Macmillan, 1871), pp. 58–60.

<sup>35</sup> *Victorians and the Machine: The Literary Response to Technology* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1968), p. 155.



Butler arrived at this conclusion from his earlier speculations that machines or tools were merely ‘extra-corporaneous limbs’ that man had designed; and, conversely, how limbs and organs should be regarded as tools fashioned by man, just as the contrivances by which bees are attracted to and fertilize the orchid should be regarded as designed by the orchid.<sup>36</sup>

But again, this returns us to the question of the nature of the personal identity of the self who is undertaking the fashioning. Butler had a strong belief that such ‘extra-corporaneous limbs’ as man possesses are just as much a part of his personal identity as is his physical and mental makeup. As early as 1865 he wrote:

It must be remembered that men are not merely the children of their parents, but they are begotten of the institutions of the state of the mechanical sciences under which they are born and bred. These things have made us what we are. We are children of the plough, the spade, and the ship; we are children of the extended liberty and knowledge which the printing press has diffused. Our ancestors added these things to their previously existing members; the new limbs were preserved by natural selection and incorporated into human society; they descended with modifications, and hence proceeds the difference between our ancestors and ourselves.<sup>37</sup>

In other words, we are just as much a product of our environment, technological or otherwise, as we are of our lineal ancestors. Butler goes on to contrast the ‘Australian savage’ with a nineteenth-century Englishman:

If it is wet [the latter] is furnished with an organ which is called an umbrella, and which seems designed for the purpose of protecting either his clothes or his lungs from the injurious effects of rain. His watch is of more importance to him than a good deal of his hair, at any rate than of his whiskers [...]. His memory goes in a pocket-book [...]. If he be a really well-developed specimen of the race, he will be furnished with a large box upon wheels, two horses, and a coachman. (*LE*, p. 218)

For Butler, therefore, personal identity extends spatially beyond the confines of the body and the mind within it. But as we have seen, it also extends temporally to all those generations of ancestors whose memories we have inherited. Personal identity could, however, extend into the future too, via written or artistic creations by authors and artists. Of course, such a view of the work extending the life of its creator for posterity

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<sup>36</sup> ‘Lucubratio Ebria’, in *Shrewsbury Edition*, ed. by Jones and Bartholomew, I: *A First Year in Canterbury Settlement and Other Early Essays*, 214–20 (p. 217). Further references to this essay are given after quotations in the text and prefixed *LE*.

<sup>37</sup> *LE*, p. 218. It should be noted that when Butler wrote ‘Lucubratio Ebria’ in 1865 he believed ‘natural selection’ and ‘evolution’ to be synonymous. As I go on to show, he came to believe this was a deception perpetrated deliberately by Darwin in order to gain acceptance for his theory.

was not a new one. However, for Butler and his desire for posthumous fame, it assumed a peculiar significance because of his conception of personal identity.

It is well known that Butler failed to make a commercial living out of his writing. After the initial modest success of *Erewhon*, on which he made a cash profit of £62 on unit sales of 3,842, he made a loss of almost one thousand pounds on the sales of the other works published in his lifetime (*NB*, p. 375). On average, he sold just three hundred copies of each of these works. Given how he believed his works had been ignored during his lifetime, one could argue that he was making a virtue out of necessity in appealing to future generations for posthumous fame. His opinion on this is well put in a letter to his publisher, Nicholas Trübner, in 1882:

Of course I don't expect to get on in a commercial sense at present, I do not go the right way to work for this; but I am going the right way to secure a lasting reputation and this is what I do care for. A man cannot have both, he must make up his mind which he means going in for. I have gone in for posthumous fame and I see no step in my literary career which I do not think calculated to promote my being held in esteem when the heat of passion has subsided. (*NB*, p. 154)

However, for Butler, it was not merely that one metaphorically enjoyed a posthumous life in one's works, but rather that the mind of the writer or artist was literally embodied in these works. By a careful study of them, one could therefore infer the character or identity of the dead artist. I use the word 'literally' deliberately, as the author-text duality was one of many that Butler sought to harmonize. In his ontology, the boundaries between author and text bleed into each other, such that the two become essentially indistinguishable, and merge to form a harmonic whole.

This has consequences for Butler's *ad hominem* style of textual criticism, a style which is manifested throughout his diverse works. The disinterested examination of data rather than the personality behind the data had been the ideal of scientific inquiry since the establishment of the Royal Society.<sup>38</sup> Indeed, the professed objectivity of the nineteenth-century man of science was an important aspect of their attempt to establish cultural authority.<sup>39</sup> For Butler, in defiant opposition to this, the author and the text could not be so conveniently dissociated, and the reading of the author was just as productive as an interpretation and evaluation of the text. In fact, the two often went hand in hand. Butler states his case explicitly: 'So far from being a poor argument [the

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<sup>38</sup> Steven Shapin and Simon Schaffer, *Leviathan and the Air-Pump: Hobbes, Boyle, and the Experimental Life* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985), p. 73.

<sup>39</sup> Gowan Dawson, *Darwin, Literature and Victorian Respectability*, Cambridge Studies in Nineteenth-Century Literature and Culture, 57 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 12–13.

*argumentum ad hominem*] is one of the most powerful in the whole armoury of logic; there are few, if any, more justly cogent.<sup>40</sup> In another context, Bernard Lightman has described Butler as ‘a strong candidate for the title of the last great natural theologian of the nineteenth century’.<sup>41</sup> But it is certainly accurate too when considering Butler’s conception of the author and their work. Just as his distant relative William Paley was able to infer the attributes of God from an examination of the book of nature, so Butler was able to infer the moral attributes of the author from the text.

These beliefs contribute towards what I have termed Butler’s ‘Lamarckian aesthetics’. I use this expression to describe two related ideas in his writings on art. First, it is used in relation to his evaluation of artworks, and is important in understanding why, for example, he privileges the art of relatively unknown Lombard and Piedmontese artists over the three masters of the High Renaissance, Leonardo da Vinci, Raphael, and Michelangelo. Second, I use it to describe Butler’s theory of the development of art in general, and of the individual artist in particular. For him, the evolution of art and the artist proceed via a combination of inherited memory and the Lamarckian concepts of desire, use, and disuse. I thereby distinguish the expression from what some commentators have termed ‘Darwinian aesthetics’ in describing how a universal aesthetic sensibility has evolved in humans from a simple bestial instinct.<sup>42</sup>

In an early chapter of *Life and Habit*, in which Butler outlines the significance of the distinction between conscious and unconscious knowledge, he makes a very explicit connection between his aesthetic and epistemological theories, albeit a connection that remains undeveloped in that work:

Learning must have a great share in the advancement of beauty, inasmuch as beauty is but knowledge perfected and incarnate [...]. There cannot be much beauty where there is consciousness of knowledge, and while knowledge is still new it must in the nature of things involve much consciousness. (*LH*, p. 32)

So, for Butler, the beauty of the artwork is intimately linked to the quality of the knowledge possessed by its creator. Beautiful art will never be created whilst the artist is consciously following academic rules. Rather, there are two routes by which beautiful art may be created. Either the artist must belong to a long line of artists who have

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<sup>40</sup> *Further Extracts from the Note-Books of Samuel Butler*, ed. by A. T. Bartholomew (London: Cape, 1934), p. 51.

<sup>41</sup> “‘A Conspiracy of One’: Butler, Natural Theology, and Victorian Popularization”, in *Victorian Against the Grain*, ed. by Paradis, pp. 113–42 (p. 128).

<sup>42</sup> See, for instance, Denis Dutton, *The Art Instinct: Beauty, Pleasure, & Human Evolution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), pp. 1–12.

consciously acquired their skill, which is then inherited in Lamarckian fashion by their descendants; or, alternatively, during their lifetime, the artist must have practised so much that their skill has become instinctive, like that of the accomplished pianist who plays complex pieces without apparent effort. For the first of these alternatives, whilst such knowledge is potentially within the reach of everyone, and not just the professionally trained, it is nevertheless inaccessible to all but a few whose ancestors have exercised pains: ‘the apparatus necessary [...] is so costly as to be within the reach of few, involving, as it does, an experience in the *use* of it for some preceding generations’ (*LH*, p. 29, emphasis added). So, although Butler’s conception of the acquisition of perfect knowledge is democratic, in that one does not need privileged access to professional institutions, it is at the same time elitist, in that it is accumulated by Lamarckian use and acquired hereditarily by good breeding.

The second route is also characterized by practice rather than by theory: ‘If a man would learn to paint, he must not theorize concerning art, nor think much what he would do beforehand, but he must do *something*.’<sup>43</sup> The artist develops through the anti-intellectual action of painting, that is, by doing, rather than through the intellectual theorizing about art. For Butler, the trajectory of the artist’s development over their life is a key evaluative criterion of their merit. In Chapter 4, I show how this is dramatized in *The Way of All of Flesh*, which I propose is, *inter alia*, a (self-) portrait of the artist as a young man, and his subsequent development to maturity: a *Künstlerroman*.

Butler was writing about art and literature at the very time that a shift was occurring from an expressionistic to an impressionistic view of art. As Ian Small describes, up until the 1860s it was commonly held that art and literature embodied and expressed certain moral values. In the movement towards Aestheticism, however, the value of art came to reside within the impressions made upon the individual.<sup>44</sup> This was exemplified by the movement from Matthew Arnold’s injunction in *On Translating Homer* (1861) ‘to see the object as in itself it really is’ to Walter Pater’s aesthetic manifesto as set out in the preface to *Studies in the History of the Renaissance* (1873).<sup>45</sup> Pater cites Arnold’s injunction, but asks in response: ‘What is this song or picture, this engaging personality

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<sup>43</sup> *Shrewsbury Edition*, ed. by Jones and Bartholomew, V: *Evolution, Old and New*, 44, emphasis in original. Further references to this volume are given after quotations in the text and prefixed *EON*.

<sup>44</sup> Ian Small, *Conditions for Criticism: Authority, Knowledge, and Literature in the Late Nineteenth Century* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), pp. 8–9.

<sup>45</sup> *On Translating Homer: Three Lectures Given at Oxford* (London: Longman, Green, Longman, and Roberts, 1861), p. 64.

presented in life or in a book, to *me*?<sup>46</sup> Butler's work is useful in this respect as he negotiates his own peculiar position astride this shift from Arnoldian objectivity to Paterian subjectivity. On the one hand, he held firmly to the very Protestant notion of the primacy of individual judgment, with its concomitant eschewal of a reliance on traditional authority. In his appreciation of art and literature this led him to his logocentric reliance on the work rather than on the critic: 'the simple method of studying text much and commentators little.'<sup>47</sup> On the other hand, art works of all kinds literally embodied the moral values of the creative mind behind them. For him, the artwork was merely a means of accessing the mind of its creator. Ultimately, therefore, he studied art and literature for what it told him about the dead artists and writers who had created it: 'the greatest value of the best work lies in its bringing us into communion with the mind we feel to lie behind it.'<sup>48</sup> This is how he came to his belief that the *Odyssey* had been written by a young Sicilian woman, and why he rearranged the sonnets to construct a coherent narrative of a period in the young Shakespeare's life. However, the relationship between author and work extended beyond merely aesthetic objects such as paintings and literature. It also deeply informs Butler's reading of the Gospel accounts of the Resurrection and Darwin's *Origin of Species*. Just as importantly, an apprehension of this relationship helps us understand how and why Butler fashioned his own posthumous persona as he did. Authorship, therefore, assumes a central position in my thesis.

Butler's aesthetics arose out of his evolutionary theories, and his harmonic conception of author and text led to an inseparable relationship between aesthetics and morality. In the next section I outline how this relationship extended to include his epistemology. In particular, I show how he came to view the professed agnosticism, in its widest sense, of scientific naturalists such as Thomas Huxley as evidence of self-deception — for Butler, an egregious form of hypocrisy — and thus how his criticism of Darwin and his supporters was grounded in ethics as much as in evolutionary theory.

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<sup>46</sup> *Studies in the History of the Renaissance*, ed. by Matthew Beaumont (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), p. 3, emphasis in original.

<sup>47</sup> *Shrewsbury Edition*, ed. by Jones and Bartholomew, XIV: *Shakespeare's Sonnets Reconsidered*, p. xvii. Further references to this volume are given after quotations in the text and prefixed SSR.

<sup>48</sup> 'On Knowing What Gives Us Pleasure', in *Shrewsbury Edition*, ed. by Jones and Bartholomew, XVIII: *Collected Essays*, vol. 1, 211–26 (p. 218).

## **Authority and epistemology**

Ian Small has asserted that ‘intellectual authority, in the sense that it furnishes coherence in explanations, is always based upon an epistemology’ (pp. 29–30). Butler, too, attempted to establish authority based upon his own epistemology. But the coherence deemed necessary by Small is ruled unattainable by him. Rather, Butler comes to realize that the best we can hope for is a coherent incoherence in our explanations, and that it is the recognition of this that distinguishes his own epistemology from those professionals whose authority he challenged. Small goes on to argue that as a result of developments in science and social science, ‘from 1860 onwards, competing epistemologies precipitated a series of crises in the nature of intellectual authority in Britain’ (p. 30). Butler is a particularly interesting figure in this respect, as his epistemology does not map neatly onto that of either the newly emergent scientific naturalists or the traditional authority of the Church or Bible. His more general target is that of the authority of the professional. Butler found himself caught uncomfortably between the traditional Victorian sage and the professional who had specialist knowledge in one of the bewildering array of new ‘ologies’. Born a generation or two after Carlyle, Ruskin, Arnold, and Mill, he published the bulk of his work during the last quarter of the nineteenth century when the authorization of knowledge became professionalized and institutionalized.

Epistemology was, for Butler, an index of morality. How a person came to know, or how they professed to know, was a reliable indicator of character. In his view professional authority was based upon an epistemology sold on a false prospectus: what purported to be an objective weighing of considerations concealed a rapacious self-interest. Butler often distinguished between these two positions in his contrast of the impartial judge with the paid advocate. The metaphor of the court of law by which Butler sought to assert his own intellectual authority was inscribed in the dialogic form of many of his works. And he extended the judicial metaphor further in his assertion that the court of last appeal in which opposing views were heard should be that of what he deemed to be the common man. In several of his works, Butler opposed the epistemologies of the philosopher or professional with that of the common man, which by way of shorthand are conscious versus unconscious knowledge, logic versus instinct, respectively. It is no surprise, therefore, that Butler sought to fashion a position for himself as the hereditary beneficiary of a long line of Menippean satirists including

Lucian, Jonathan Swift, and his namesake, Samuel Butler. For Butler, authority was conferred by the more perfect unconscious knowledge of the common man rather than by the logical absurdities of the philosopher.

However, as I go on to discuss in Chapter 5, this is seemingly paradoxical. On the one hand, unconscious knowledge is the product of generations of tradition; on the other, traditional authority was in several cases, such as biblical exegesis and the teaching of classical literature, the very authority that Butler was seeking to overturn. The solution to the paradox is to be found in the generations of scholars, ‘professional’ before the term was recognized as such, who have thrown sand in the eye of the public to deceive it of the truth in order to promote their own self-interest. Rick Rylance has written that Lamarckism was useful to Herbert Spencer in that it provided ‘an anchor for his epistemology and ethics. If ideas and principles survive, the argument goes, they are, to all intents and purposes, “true”.’<sup>49</sup> However, for Butler, survival — or tradition — was not a sufficient condition for truth. Ideas and principles concerning, for instance, the Resurrection or the authorship of the *Odyssey*, could survive irrespective of their truth.

The distinction Butler draws between the impartial judge and the advocate paid to argue for a particular position can be seen in his earliest work on Darwin, in which he praises Darwin’s ‘judicial’ style.<sup>50</sup> George Levine has demonstrated that intellectual honesty was crucial in establishing scientific authority: ‘with the recognition of the inescapable presence of the interpreting self, it was incumbent on all scientists and thinkers the more rigorously to repress their own biases. Honesty in representations, not intellectual power and ingenuity, is the greatest virtue’ (p. 3). Gowan Dawson, too, maintains that a perception of intellectual honesty was vital in establishing authority (Dawson, p. 13). In Chapter 2, I argue that dishonesty in representation is precisely one of the charges Butler later brings to bear on Darwin in particular, and men of science in general. Butler believed that scientific naturalists professed their judicial, disinterested views whilst actually acting as paid advocates in support of their quest to wrest cultural authority away from the Church. For Butler, the moral high ground was claimed by those who acknowledged their lack of objectivity.

This hypocrisy of certain men of science extended into the realm of religion too,

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<sup>49</sup> Rick Rylance, *Victorian Psychology and British Culture 1850–1880* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 299.

<sup>50</sup> ‘Darwin on the Origin of Species: A Dialogue’, in *Shrewsbury Edition*, ed. by Jones and Bartholomew, I: *A First Year in Canterbury Settlement*, 184–207 (p. 189). Further references to this dialogue are given after quotations in the text and prefixed *DOS*.

through their advocacy of agnosticism. Several critics have mistakenly described Butler as an agnostic.<sup>51</sup> In Chapter 3 I describe more fully the parallel developments of Butler's theology and his epistemology, but in summary his emphatic rejection of agnosticism can be traced in part to his privileging of unconscious instinct over conscious reason as a path to knowledge: 'In all cases of doubt, the promptings of a kindly disposition are more trustworthy than the conclusions of logic' (*NB*, pp. 337–38). But this was precisely what agnostics denied. If reason is used and carried to its logical conclusion, the results are merely absurd, becoming self-contradictory:

There is one thing certain, namely, that we can have nothing certain; therefore it is not certain that we can have nothing certain [...]. The only thing to do is to glance at the chaos on which our thoughts are founded, recognize that it is a chaos and that, in the nature of things, no theoretically firm ground is even conceivable. (*NB*, p. 337)

'No theoretically firm ground' perhaps, but in order to live, as Butler recognizes, we must come to some accommodation with the contradictory logical chaos into which such ratiocination leads. And for him this means that practically, we must be guided by our instinct, the accumulation of the conscious behaviour of countless generations of ancestors, gradually becoming unconscious as it becomes habitual. For practical purposes then, the firmest ground conceivable is constituted by faith, not by reason. In order to live, one must have faith, however strenuously agnostics would deceive themselves and deny this. Even Euclidean geometry, the foundation of Victorian rationalism, was built on faith: '[it] requires postulates and axioms which transcend demonstration and without which [Euclid] can do nothing. His superstructure is demonstration, his ground is faith.'<sup>52</sup> For Butler, therefore, agnosticism is tantamount to self-deception, and as I go on to show in Chapter 3, self-deception was a serious moral defect for Butler, more so even than hypocrisy. That he lays this defect at the door of agnostics is indicative of the distance between his own epistemology and agnosticism.

Butler's work can thus productively be used to illuminate debates about the ideal of objectivity in the latter half of the nineteenth century, as Levine and Christopher Herbert have both recently demonstrated. Herbert opposes 'relativity' with objectivity,

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<sup>51</sup> For a recent example see Parkin-Gounelas in *Victorian Against the Grain*, ed. by Paradis, p. 196. Linda Dowling groups Butler with the agnostics Leslie Stephen and Thomas Huxley in adopting 'the scientific ethic of unbelief'. See *The Vulgarization of Art: The Victorians and Aesthetic Democracy* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1996), p. 51.

<sup>52</sup> *NB*, p. 337. William Kingdon Clifford, the mathematician often associated with scientific naturalists such as Huxley and John Tyndall, developed a non-Euclidean geometry that was based upon empiricism rather than the untestable axioms of Euclidean geometry. See Dawson, pp. 163–64; Joan L. Richards, *Mathematical Visions: The Pursuit of Geometry in Victorian England* (San Diego: Academic Press, 1988), p. 2.



and describes Butler as ‘the shrewd spokesman of relativity theory’ (p. 62). In a similar vein, the epigraph of the Epilogue to Levine’s *Dying to Know* is taken from Butler: ‘To a living being then there can be no absolute ... . The remarkable thing, however, is that though we very well know absolute truth to be unattainable, we are inevitably constrained to act as if it were attainable’ (Levine, p. 268). Levine, therefore, finds Butler useful in his discussion of objectivity because of his simultaneous ‘deep distrust of the idea’ and his ‘sense that its alternative is equally untenable’ (p. 272). For both Levine and Herbert, Butler’s more mature writings provide some of the clearest examples of a more general late nineteenth-century movement towards relativism, towards a scepticism that absolute truth or complete disinterestedness can be attained. I contend that Butler’s denial of the existence, or discoverability, of absolute truth arises both from his harmonicism — that every truth carries within it its own partially invalidating falsehood — and from his general avoidance of extremes, of which absolute truth is one.

The importance to Butler of finding a middle way between two extremes is attested by the epigraphs to two of his works. The epigraph to *Erewhon* is taken from Aristotle’s *Politics*, which Butler translates as: ‘There is no action save upon a balance of considerations.’ In *Ex Voto* (1888), the epigraph is taken from the French monk and scholar Jean Mabillon, writing under the pseudonym of Eusebius Romanus in 1698: ‘Il n’y a que deux ennemis de la religion — le trop peu, et le trop; et des deux le trop est mille fois le plus dangereux.’<sup>53</sup> One could argue also that the surname of his protagonist in *The Way of All Flesh*, Ernest Pontifex, which translates from the Latin as ‘bridge builder’, alludes to Butler’s desire to navigate a way between extremes. This preference for a middle way is enacted by his use of a dialogic form, and also inheres in his frequent use of the metaphor of the court of law. Truth, for Butler, is contingent, relative, and emerges from the consideration of competing claims.

In addition to this interest in Victorian epistemology, much valuable work has been undertaken investigating the means by which professional men of science sought to wrest cultural authority from both amateur gentlemen-naturalists and theologians, and to fashion an authoritative identity for themselves. For instance, Paul White has shown how Thomas Huxley forged links with the literary world and theologians in order to appropriate for himself and his peers those traditional badges of authority worn by the

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<sup>53</sup> ‘There are only two enemies of religion — too little and too much; and of the two, too much is a thousand times more dangerous.’ (My translation).

Victorian sage and the clergy.<sup>54</sup> In the decades before the publication of the *Origin of Species*, biological theories had become politicized, and the progressive evolution of Lamarck was associated with radicalism.<sup>55</sup> However, as Dawson persuasively argues, ‘from the late 1860s attention shifted increasingly from general concerns with political propriety to specific anxieties about sexual respectability’ (p. 4). In order to establish their own authority, scientific naturalists had to demonstrate their wholesome respectability to the constituencies whose approval they courted by dissociating themselves from, *inter alia*, the taint of Aestheticism (Dawson, pp. 24–25).

A reconsideration of Butler is important in extending these debates regarding the establishment of authority as his work spanned so many cultural fields. Not only does Butler shift the terms of the debate regarding the authority of the scientific naturalists, but also, as argued above, he widens it to encompass the professional classes in general, be they clergymen, the art establishment, or academics. In its examination of Butler’s close reading of the *Origin*, and his consequent charge of plagiarism against Darwin, my study in part builds upon Dawson’s claim that the supporters of Darwinism had to defend themselves against various charges of moral turpitude. However, if Butler’s contestation of cultural authority had been confined to that of Huxley and his fellow professional scientists, it would be possible to explain it away as a straightforward resistance of the new by the old, of the progressive by the conservative. Unlike Huxley, Butler was very much a Victorian insider: Cambridge-educated, and from a well-connected family. His grandfather had been a bishop and one of the most influential educationalists in the first half of the nineteenth century, on a par with Matthew Arnold’s father, Thomas Arnold, headmaster of Rugby; and one of his sisters had married George Bridges, brother of the future Poet Laureate, Robert Bridges. Moreover, following his successful sheep-farming venture in New Zealand in the early 1860s, Butler was almost financially independent, and thus part of the class of gentlemen-amateurs that the new professionals, such as Huxley, sought to marginalize. So, as James Paradis has written, Butler’s persona as a ‘literary outsider’ was fashioned by himself out of the experience of an insider.<sup>56</sup> But it is precisely these peculiar harmonics of insider and outsider that make Butler such a fascinating figure in any discussion of the

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<sup>54</sup> *Thomas Huxley: Making the ‘Man of Science’* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 4–5.

<sup>55</sup> Adrian Desmond, *The Politics of Evolution: Morphology, Medicine, and Reform in Radical London* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969), p. 24.

<sup>56</sup> ‘Butler after Butler: The Man of Letters as Outsider’, in *Victorian Against the Grain*, ed. by Paradis, pp. 343–69 (pp. 345–46).

establishment of authority and the development of knowledge. His dialogic form and multivocal satire enact both his liminal position and the split self he used to evaluate his own competing theories. In turn, he hoped that the conclusions at which he arrived would be tested in public forum against competing ideas of others. However, for a variety of reasons that I go on to explore, his works were ignored, or at best, engaged with only superficially. Rather than being strengthened by vigorous public debate, many of his ideas thus atrophied in Lamarckian fashion through lack of use. Nevertheless, his ostensible failure to fashion for himself an authoritative writerly persona does not make him any less useful as a subject of study. On the contrary, it speaks eloquently of the construction of authority by the various classes of professionals against whom he railed.

### **Synopsis of chapters**

In Chapter 1 I examine ‘Darwin Among the Machines’ and ‘Lucubratio Ebria’, two of the early evolutionary articles Butler wrote in 1863 and 1865, respectively, and which were the progenitors of the important ‘Book of the Machines’ episode in *Erewhon*. As a starting point, I take at face value Butler’s assertion that in this episode he was not satirizing Darwinian natural selection but the argument from analogy in general; and that, in particular, his target was Bishop Joseph Butler’s *Analogy of Religion*. The use of analogical reasoning by Bishop Butler, as well as by William Paley, was the subject of much criticism in the mid-nineteenth century, and Butler’s satirical treatment is situated within this context. In his two early evolutionary articles we see for the first time Butler’s appreciation of the dangers in following a rational argument to its logical conclusion, an appreciation which became important in his evolving epistemology. ‘Lucubratio Ebria’ is the most significant of Butler’s early essays, for it is here, I argue, that we find the first evidence of his incipient Lamarckism. This essay therefore forms the basis of his later literary criticism and his aesthetics.

Chapter 2 unpicks the tangled relationship in Butler’s evolutionary works between knowledge production, morality, and authority. In so doing it offers a new reading of the Butler–Darwin relationship, and demonstrates how Darwin’s rhetorical strategy in the *Origin* and elsewhere, supported by the nascent nineteenth-century Darwin industry, was used to construct an authorial persona that sought to straddle the seemingly antithetical aims of originality and humility. Butler, however, exposes this textual persona as a sham, at odds with the actuality, and accuses Darwin of failing to

acknowledge the work of earlier evolutionists, including his grandfather Erasmus Darwin, in order to claim the theory of evolution as his own. More generally, this attack on Darwin and his supporters is part of a wider critique of the professional in all disciplines. Butler contrasts the professional with the ‘common man’ and argues that the former has no more right to the means of production of knowledge than has the latter. The chapter also illustrates how Butler inferred Darwin’s moral attributes from a close reading of the *Origin*, an *ad hominem* style of criticism to be found in most of his works.

Chapter 3 examines Butler’s evolving epistemology through the lens of his theology. I consider five related works: the early anonymous pamphlet, *The Evidence for the Resurrection* (1865), the pseudonymous *The Fair Haven* (1873), the polypseudonymous correspondence ‘A Clergyman’s Doubts’ (1879), *The Way of All Flesh*, written between 1873 and 1885, and *Erewhon Revisited* (1901). In addition to demonstrating how these works trace the development of Butler’s epistemology, I also show how the various formal and generic qualities of the texts facilitated this evolution. Rather than reading Butler’s biography as a conventional nineteenth-century loss of faith, I argue that it conforms more closely to Timothy Larsen’s ‘reconversion narrative’. From an early espousal of both empiricism and rationalism, and a belief in the existence and discoverability of absolute truth, Butler moved towards a relativism that subordinated reason to faith as the ‘court of last appeal’. Theologically, this is manifested in a movement from sympathy towards Unitarianism to the endorsement of the Broad Church views of his grandfather, as dramatized in the theological debates of *Erewhon Revisited*. I end the chapter with a discussion of the important issue of self-deception, and argue that this is central to my thesis as to why Butler was not an agnostic.

Whereas I claim that Butler’s various works of biblical criticism are important primarily for the light they cast on his evolving epistemology, they do also, as outlined above, illustrate the blurring of the boundaries between author and text; how neither can be evaluated without a consideration of the other. In his two works of art criticism, *Alps and Sanctuaries* (1881) and *Ex Voto* (1888), the intimate nature of this relationship is dealt with much more fully, in his championing of the relatively obscure artists of Piedmont and Lombardy against the three masters of the High Renaissance, Raphael, Leonardo da Vinci, and Michelangelo. In Chapter 4, I trace the connections between Butler’s aesthetics, his epistemology, and his ethics. Moreover, I show that his theories of artistic appreciation and evaluation derive from the ideas set out in his evolutionary works, and thereby constitute a Lamarckian aesthetics. Butler uses his understanding of

*quattrocento* and *cinquecento* Italian art as a means to critique contemporary art, particularly that of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood (PRB). There are several points of similarity between Butler's condemnation of the PRB and that of Max Nordau's *Degeneration* (1892). However, the chapter highlights the crucial differences between Butler's and Nordau's views of late nineteenth-century culture. Butler's Lamarckism is central to his notion of genius. I show that, for him, artistic genius can be a culturally recuperative agency rather than a symptom of fin-de-siècle cultural decline. His Lamarckian aesthetics therefore offer a hopeful vision of the fin de siècle, and a remedy to the state of degeneration arising from Nordau's understanding of Darwinian evolutionary theory.

In my final chapter I consider four projects with which Butler was involved in the decade before his death: the *Life and Letters* of his grandfather (1896); his re-engagement with classical Greek literature; *Shakespeare's Sonnets Reconsidered* (1899); and the construction of his own posthumous life via the ordering, selecting, and editing of his correspondence and notebooks. I show that these projects are the culmination of his ideas on personal identity, and exemplify most vividly his views on the co-dependence of aesthetics and morality, and the harmonic nature of author and text. Given Butler's theory of the continuity of personal identity, I argue that the *Life and Letters of Dr. Samuel Butler* is as much a part of his own self-fashioning project as it is a conventional biography of his grandfather. *The Authoress of the Odyssey*, in which he proposes that the epic was written by a young Sicilian woman, demonstrates how, by analogy, Butler uses the known present to infer knowledge of the unknown past. And in his work on Shakespeare's sonnets I show how his theory of the development of artistic genius was put into the service of exculpating Shakespeare from any suspicion of homosexuality. Published in the wake of Oscar Wilde's trials for gross indecency, I suggest that by so doing, Butler was also distancing himself from any similar taints, and that it thereby constitutes his final major act of self-fashioning before his death in 1902.

## Chapter 1

### Butler's Use of Analogical Reasoning

When Butler's first novel, *Erewhon*, was published anonymously in 1872, it immediately provoked comment amongst reviewers on two issues that would become important themes in his later work. First, Butler believed that the favourable reviews and what would be uncharacteristically strong sales were due to a misattribution of authorship to Edward Bulwer-Lytton, whose anonymous *The Coming Race* had been published the previous year, and to which *Erewhon* bore a close resemblance according to some reviewers. Butler defends himself against any potential charges of plagiarism in the preface to the second edition (*E*, p. 29), and later wrote that 'the reviewers did not know but what the book might have been written by a somebody whom it might not turn out well to have cut up, and whom it might turn out very well to have praised' (Jones, *Memoir*, I, 155). Butler was well aware of the mutually constitutive relationship between author and text, of how the authority of the text was conferred by the reputation of the author, and how this in turn was based upon other texts. They were in fact two sides of the same coin. Plagiarism was therefore as much the purloining of a literary persona as it was the appropriation of a text. However, Butler's idea of the continuity of personal identity blurred the boundary between plagiarism and originality as I go on to show.

Second, reviewers were divided over the authorial intentions within the 'Book of the Machines' episode in *Erewhon*. Several of them read the episode as a clever satire on rhetorical method, by highlighting the absurd or uncomfortable conclusions to which apparently plausible arguments may lead.<sup>1</sup> However, some of the early reviewers read the episode specifically as a satire or a burlesque of Darwinian evolution. In particular, the negative *Athenaeum* reviewer asserted that it 'seem[s] to be an attempt to reduce to the absurd the whole theory of evolution'.<sup>2</sup> Butler strongly refuted this misreading of his intentions in the preface to the anonymous second edition:

I regret that reviewers have in some cases been inclined to treat the chapters on Machines as an attempt to reduce Mr Darwin's theory to an absurdity. Nothing could be further from my intention, and few things would be more distasteful to me than any attempt to laugh at Mr Darwin; but I must own that I have myself to thank for the misconception, for I felt sure that my intention would be missed, but preferred not to weaken the chapters by

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<sup>1</sup> See, for example, 'The New Gulliver', *Spectator*, 20 April 1872, pp. 492–94; and E. M. A. Savage, 'Erewhon. Trübner & Co.', *Drawing-Room Gazette*, 8 June 1872, repr. in Jones, *Memoir*, II, 439–43 (pp. 441–42).

<sup>2</sup> 'Erewhon; or, Over the Range (Trübner & Co)', *Athenaeum*, 20 April 1872, p. 492.

explanation, and knew very well that Mr Darwin's theory would take no harm. The only question in my mind was how far *I* could afford to be misrepresented as laughing at that for which I have the most profound admiration. I am surprised, however, that the book at which such an example of the specious misuse of analogy would seem most naturally levelled should have occurred to no reviewer; neither shall I mention the name of the book here, though I should fancy that the hint given will suffice. (*E*, pp. 29–30)

Butler had made a similar claim seven years earlier in 'The Mechanical Creation', one of the three articles that formed the germ of the 'Book of the Machines' episode in *Erewhon*. In this, he is cognisant that he may be misunderstood and writes that 'the last thing which we should wish to do, would be to throw ridicule on Darwin's magnificent work'.<sup>3</sup>

Peter Mudford has written that the unnamed book referred to in the preface to *Erewhon* which is the target of the 'specious misuse of analogy' is William Paley's *Natural Theology* (*E*, p. 263). I shall argue that Paley was indeed one of the targets of Butler's satire, but that he also made more constructive use of Paley's analogy between man-made machines and natural design as the foundation of his Lamarckian evolutionary theory. Instead, as a starting point, I intend to take at face value the assertion Butler made in a letter to Charles Darwin that the target of his satire was actually Bishop Butler's *Analogy of Religion*. In the letter, written after the publication of *Erewhon*, Butler explains his authorial intentions behind the 'Book of the Machines' episode:

I have developed and worked out the obviously absurd theory that [machines] are about to supplant the human race and be developed into a higher kind of life. When I first got hold of the idea, I developed it for mere fun and because it amused me and I thought would amuse others, but without a particle of serious meaning; but I developed it and introduced it into *Erewhon* with the intention of implying: 'See how easy it is to be plausible, and what absurd propositions can be defended by a little ingenuity and distortion and departure from strictly scientific methods,' and I had Butler's *Analogy* in my head as the book at which it should be aimed.<sup>4</sup>

To understand why it is plausible to believe this assertion, it is necessary to outline the period in Butler's life just before he left for New Zealand in 1859. This will demonstrate that his epistemology was grounded in personal experience, rather than in an unreflective belief in traditional authority. I then go on to discuss the reception of the *Analogy* in the mid-nineteenth century, and show that Butler was certainly not alone in

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<sup>3</sup> 'The Mechanical Creation', in *Shrewsbury Edition*, ed. by Jones and Bartholomew, I: *A First Year in Canterbury Settlement*, 231–37 (p. 231).

<sup>4</sup> Quoted in Jones, *Memoir*, I, 156–57 (p. 156) (11 May 1872).

highlighting the shortcomings of its method of argument. In the following section I examine how Butler uses an argument based upon a consciously false analogy in one of his early responses to the *Origin*, ‘Darwin Among the Machines’, and show how this was incorporated into and expanded upon in the ‘Book of the Machines’ in *Erewhon*. In the final section, I discuss another of Butler’s responses to the *Origin*, ‘Lucubratio Ebria’, which contains the germs of his Lamarckian evolutionary theory, a theory developed at length in his four later evolutionary works, *Life and Habit* (1878), *Evolution, Old and New* (1879), *Unconscious Memory* (1880), and *Luck, or Cunning?* (1887).

### **Infant baptism and Butler’s empiricism**

After taking his degree in Classics at St John’s College, Cambridge, Butler intended to return and study for ordination. In preparation for this, he worked as a lay assistant at St James’s, Piccadilly in London (Jones, *Memoir*, I, 60). Whilst there he discovered that some boys in his parish had not been baptized, and realized that it was impossible to distinguish between baptized and unbaptized children merely by observing their behaviour and character (*Memoir*, I, 61). A belief in the necessity for infant baptism formed part of the Thirty-Nine Articles to which all Church of England ordinands had to subscribe, and Butler’s scepticism as to its efficacy thus presented an obstacle to ordination. In a letter to his father, Butler singles out Article XV as the problem:

The passage in the Articles is this: Art. XV. ‘But all we the rest, though baptised and born again in Christ, yet offend in many things [...]; and if we say that we have no sin we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us’ [...] — Believing for my own part that a man can, by making use of the ordinary means of grace, attain a condition in which he can say, ‘I do not offend *knowingly* in any one thing either habitually or otherwise and believe that whereas once on a time I was full of sin I have now been cleansed from all sin and am Holy even as Christ was holy upon earth.’<sup>5</sup>

However arcane the issue of infant baptism may appear, Butler’s letter to his father suggests broader implications, which I explore more fully in later chapters, and introduce here. The concept of original sin held that man was sinful from birth, an innate, hereditary condition resulting from Adam’s fall, which necessitated infant baptism as a means of attaining grace. There is therefore a distinction between this unconscious knowledge inherited from Adam and conscious knowledge arising from

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<sup>5</sup> *Family Letters*, ed. by Silver, pp. 73–74 (p. 73) (9 May 1859), emphasis in original.



experience. For Butler, the newly born child cannot knowingly — that is, consciously — offend, and therefore should not be consigned to hell if it dies unbaptized. Butler's letter also introduces the complex idea of self-deception. The very phrase implies a multiplicity of selves, one self deceiving the other(s). As I demonstrate in Chapter 5, Butler conceptualized personal identity as a congeries of memories, inherited from all our ancestors, and offering conflicting past experiences. On the face of it, therefore, self-deception should be a universal part of the human condition. However, for Butler, it was an egregious vice, and one that he associated with professionals in all the disciplines in which he intervened.

Infant baptism was topical at the time Butler expressed his own doubts. Some years earlier in the so-called Gorham case, the High Church Bishop of Exeter, Henry Philpotts, had refused to institute George Gorham to the crown incumbency of Bramford Speke on account of his heterodox views on the matter.<sup>6</sup> In an article published in a High Church periodical around the time Butler was engaged in his parish duties in London, the need for infant baptism was asserted in alarmist terms:

For it may be, that as infant baptism is happily with us the rule, we are preserved from those terrible cases of demoniacal possession which undoubtedly prevailed in the earlier ages of the Christian Church. We do not often enough reflect on what or how many evil spirits may be deprived of their power to injure by the reception of that Sacrament.<sup>7</sup>

Butler possessed Samuel Wilberforce's *Agathos, and Other Sunday Stories*, a very popular collection of religious parables and allegories for children. First published in 1839, it was in its nineteenth edition by 1857.<sup>8</sup> Butler's observations of his parishioners may have been prompted by a story in this collection, 'The Tent on the Plain — Holy Baptism', a parable about the efficacy of infant baptism. In this story, the narrator observes the behaviour of groups of rural and urban children wearing the 'ring of adoption', a symbol of baptism, and learns that baptism without subsequent faith will not be sufficient to enter the kingdom of Heaven. Moreover, reflecting the fears of the author of the *Christian Remembrancer* article quoted above, evil spirits are allegorized and

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<sup>6</sup> John Wolffe, 'Gorham, George Cornelius (1787–1857)', *ODNB* <doi:10.1093/ref:odnb/11099>.

<sup>7</sup> 'Lectures on the Right Use of the Early Fathers', *Christian Remembrancer*, October 1858, pp. 291–330 (p. 311).

<sup>8</sup> This book is listed in the catalogue of books possessed by Butler that were donated to St John's College, Cambridge. See Henry Festing Jones and A. T. Bartholomew, *The Samuel Butler Collection at St. John's College, Cambridge: A Catalogue and a Commentary* (Cambridge: Heffer, 1921), p. 41. Thomas Huxley had a well-known debate on evolution with Wilberforce, then Bishop of Oxford, at the British Association meeting at Oxford in 1860.

are seen by the narrator as preying on the unbaptized or those who have lost their faith.<sup>9</sup>

Butler later satirizes baptism in *Erewhon*. The narrator attempts to convert the savage Chowbok to Christianity and ‘explain[s] to him the mysteries of the Trinity and of original sin’ (p. 63). He baptizes Chowbok, but worries about its efficacy: ‘On the evening of the same day that I baptized him he tried for the twentieth time to steal the brandy, which made me rather unhappy as to whether I could have baptized him rightly’ (p. 64). In contrast, Arowhena, whom the narrator later marries, allows herself to be baptized but retains her Erewhonian religious beliefs rather than subscribing to the Anglican beliefs of the narrator. Her basic goodness, despite her heterodoxy, leads the narrator to contrast her ‘with many very godly people who have had a great knowledge of divinity, but no sense of the divine’ (p. 154). Observation of the contrasting behaviour of Chowbok and Arowhena would grant no clues to the fact that both had been baptized. Moreover, for Butler, an intuitive ‘sense of the divine’ is more important than conscious ‘knowledge of divinity’.

In the same year as the first publication of *Agathos*, the Unitarian James Martineau wrote of the absurdity of infant baptism in his paper ‘Christianity Without Priest and Without Ritual’ (1839). Contrasting the language of the liturgy of baptism with the lack of understanding and volition of the child being baptized, he writes:

Belief, desire, resolve, are acts of some one’s mind: the language of this service attributes them to the personality of the infant [...]; yet there they cannot possibly exist [...]. What intelligible meaning can be attached to these phrases of sanctity applied to an age not responsible? In what sense, and by what indication, are these children *holier* than others?<sup>10</sup>

In the same paper, Martineau goes on to demonstrate that baptism is ‘destitute of sanction from the Scriptures’, an assertion made later by Benjamin Jowett in his contribution to the controversial *Essays and Reviews* (1860), ‘On the Interpretation of Scripture’.<sup>11</sup> On the issue of infant baptism, therefore, Butler’s Pelagianism — a denial of the doctrine of original sin — was a very orthodox heterodoxy, but one that demonstrates an early distaste for determinism, and a concomitant belief in the primacy

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<sup>9</sup> ‘The Tent on the Plain — Holy Baptism’, in *Agathos, and Other Sunday Stories*, 7th edn (London: Seeley and Burnside, 1842), pp. 139–66.

<sup>10</sup> ‘Christianity Without Priest and Without Ritual’, in *Studies in Christianity: A Series of Papers* (London: Longmans, Green, 1879), pp. 35–82 (p. 49).

<sup>11</sup> Martineau, ‘Christianity’, p. 61; ‘On the Interpretation of Scripture’, in *Essays and Reviews* (London: Parker, 1860), pp. 330–433 (p. 360).

of free will in the attainment of grace. Moreover, this belief adumbrates his preference for Lamarckian cunning over Darwinian luck in his evolutionary works.

Scriptural authority for infant baptism, robust or otherwise, was not, however, sufficient for Butler: he required personal empirical evidence, by observing the behaviour of a group of children, albeit, unlike Wilberforce's narrator, to arrive at his heterodox conclusion. Butler's reliance on observation rather than on traditional authority as the route to knowledge was grounded in the scientific method of the Enlightenment, and places him in a very English empirical tradition stretching from John Locke to John Stuart Mill. But he encountered instances when personal experience was unable to furnish knowledge directly, such as when attempting to discover a true account of the Resurrection. Here, he had to rely on the testimony set out in the four contradictory Gospel accounts. This raises the question, however, of the epistemological weight one should accord testimonial evidence, and whose testimony should be regarded as the most authoritative. Moreover, it foregrounds the intimate relationship between author and text, which played such a major role in Butler's conception of authorship and authority. I address this issue in Chapter 3, when I examine Butler's writings on the Resurrection. In the next section, however, I return to Bishop Butler and the use of analogy in knowledge production. Samuel Butler employed such argument from analogy in *Erewhon* to demonstrate the absurdities to which such logical reasoning could lead. His subversion of the logical method of his namesake is therefore a crucial step on his own epistemological trajectory away from reason and back to a form of faith.

### **Bishop Butler's *Analogy of Religion***

Butler would have been familiar with the benefits and dangers of analogical reasoning from his study of John Stuart Mill's *System of Logic* at Cambridge.<sup>12</sup> Analogy implies both similarity and difference combining in Butlerian harmony. For the analogy to be valid, the correspondence between the two entities must be similar in key aspects; but the analogy would collapse into identity if they were not at the same time different in some other. Within every analogy lurks a potential disanalogy. Charles Darwin, like Bishop Butler before him, is aware of the dangers and warns that 'analogy may be a deceitful

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<sup>12</sup> Parkin-Gounelas, in *Victorian Against the Grain*, ed. by Paradis, p. 197.

guide'.<sup>13</sup> Used in both theological and scientific debate, analogy is dialogic and contestable, in contrast to the univocity of an Aristotelian syllogism, whose single conclusion derives necessarily from its premises. One can understand, therefore, why both the use and subversion of analogical reasoning proved such potent instruments in Butler's work.

Along with William Paley's *A View of the Evidences of Christianity* (1794), Bishop Butler's *Analogy* was foundational in arguing for the authenticity of the Scriptures and hence for the truth of Christianity.<sup>14</sup> Samuel Butler studied both these texts at Cambridge. In his second year as an undergraduate, he sat the Previous Examination, and one of the compulsory papers examined Paley's *Evidences of Christianity*.<sup>15</sup> Bishop Butler's *Analogy* was also required reading for students studying for ordination. In his advice to theological students, the Rev. E. Harold Browne, Norrisian Professor of Divinity whilst Butler was a student, advised 'every one [...] to give great attention to Butler's *Analogy*. It has been set, either in whole or in part, every year since the foundation of the Theological tripos [in 1856]'.<sup>16</sup>

Bishop Butler had written the *Analogy* in an attempt to defend a theology based upon external written revelation from the challenges of deists. Deism arose most proximately out of the rationalism of Galileo and Descartes, and from their demonstration that truth was arrived at by human reason rather than by divine revelation. The early eighteenth-century deists such as John Toland, Anthony Collins, and Matthew Tindal, although believing in the existence of God, rejected as irrational central Christian dogmas such as the divinity of Christ and the occurrence of miracles, and they thus rejected the Church's authority. Tindal's *Christianity as Old as the Creation* (1731) argued, in the form of a dialogue, for the supremacy of natural over revealed religion.<sup>17</sup> Bishop Butler's response, a few years later, was to deny this supremacy and to assert the analogy of the two. Using this analogy, he hoped to demonstrate that a consideration of the natural world would make credible the revelations of the Scriptures.

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<sup>13</sup> *On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection* (London: Murray, 1859), p. 484.

<sup>14</sup> Josef L. Altholz, *Anatomy of a Controversy: The Debate over 'Essays and Reviews' 1860–1864* (Aldershot: Scolar, 1994), p. 4.

<sup>15</sup> From 1822 to 1920, the *Evidences* was a required text for undergraduate examinations at Cambridge. See *Essays and Reviews: The 1860 Text and its Reading*, ed. by Victor Shea and William Whitla (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2000), p. 129.

<sup>16</sup> Rev. E. Harold Browne, 'On Theological Examinations', in *The Student's Guide to the University of Cambridge* (Cambridge: Deighton, Bell; London: Bell and Dandy, 1863), pp. 215–35 (p. 231); F. W. B. Bullock, *A History of Training for the Ministry of the Church of England in England and Wales from 1800 to 1874* (St Leonards-on-Sea: Budd & Gillatt, 1955), p. 80.

<sup>17</sup> B. W. Young, 'Tindal, Matthew (bap. 1657, d. 1733)', *ODNB* <doi:10.1093/ref:odnb/27462>.

Such a premise is based upon the patristic exegesis of Origen, who is quoted in his introduction:

Hence, namely from analogical reasoning, *Origen* has with singular sagacity observed, that *he who believes the Scripture to have proceeded from him who is the Author of Nature, may well expect to find the same sort of difficulties in it, as are found in the constitution of Nature.* And in a like way of reflection it may be added, that he who denies the Scripture to have been from God upon account of these difficulties, may, for the very same reason, deny the world to have been formed by him. On the other hand, if there be an analogy or likeness between that system of things and dispensation of Providence, which revelation informs us of, and that system of things and dispensation of Providence, which experience together with reason informs us of, *i.e.* the known course of Nature; this is a presumption, that they have both the same author and cause; at least so far as to answer objections against the former's being from God, drawn from any thing which is analogical or similar to what is in the latter, which is acknowledged to be from him; for an Author of Nature is here supposed. (Joseph Butler, pp. 5–6, emphasis in original)

Bishop Butler is here responding specifically to the fact that the deists did indeed hold that there was an 'Author of Nature'. Since God is the source of both the natural world and the Scriptures, this analogy, as far as it holds, allows one to observe the natural world and reason inductively in order to draw conclusions about the spiritual world and the Scriptures. He argues from analogy that since the deists do not have a problem accepting the difficulties interpreting the natural world, neither should they have one interpreting those in the Scriptures, such as the supernatural occurrence of miracles, since they both proceed from the same source.

Nevertheless, Bishop Butler warns about the limitations of basing one's argument on the use of analogy. All he claims is that 'we unquestionably are assured, that analogy is of weight, *in various degrees*, towards determining our judgment, and our practice' (p. 5, emphasis added). No analogy, in other words, will be perfect. Hans-Peter Breuer has argued that, because of the lack of rigour in the analogies used, the danger of such a method in general is that 'even a questionable degree of similarity between what is known (the empirical realm) and what is to be established can be turned into a seemingly valid proof'.<sup>18</sup> It is for this reason, Breuer argues, that Samuel Butler was able to point to the 'specious misuse of analogy' in the preface to the second edition of *Erewhon* (Breuer, p. 373). In contrast to the inductive nature of analogical reasoning, the Aristotelian deductive method leads to proof, rather than probability. In *The Fair Haven*,

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<sup>18</sup> 'Samuel Butler's "The Book of the Machines" and the Argument from Design', *Modern Philology*, 72 (1975), 365–83 (p. 373).

Samuel Butler writes ironically that he hopes to convert unbelievers by the ‘irresistible chain of purest reason’ (*FH*, pp. 75–76). This metaphor of the deductive method as a chain illustrates its nature well. The nature of proof by deduction is based upon a series of premises, which, if accepted as true, leads one ineluctably to a conclusion that is also necessarily true.<sup>19</sup>

Later, Paley used such an inductive method in *Natural Theology*. As Matthew Eddy and David Knight have pointed out, however, the nature of the argument used by Paley (and also by Darwin) is less like a chain than a rope. Paley saturates the reader with example after example, the sheer weight of which suggests that their conclusions are probably true. These examples are likened to the fibres of a rope, any one of which could break without materially undermining the integrity of the rope. Likewise, the refutation of any of the many examples does not refute the whole argument. In contrast, in a chain, if any of the links in the deductive argument breaks, the whole argument is invalidated.<sup>20</sup>

Although Bishop Butler warned about the dangers of arguing from analogy this did not prevent his nineteenth-century critics from satirically misapplying his method, as Samuel Butler would do, or by more seriously following his arguments through to their logical conclusion and thus demonstrating their absurdity. In a letter of 1863 to Charles Kingsley, Thomas Huxley acerbically notes that

I am too much a believer in [Bishop] Butler and in the great principle of the ‘Analogy’ that ‘there is no absurdity in theology so great that you cannot parallel it by a greater absurdity of Nature’ (it is not commonly stated in this way), to have any difficulties about miracles.<sup>21</sup>

More seriously, Walter Bagehot, too, had attacked what he believed to be Bishop Butler’s false use of analogy in an essay of 1854. He writes that, according to the Bishop’s argument,

as soon as you can show that a difficulty exists in nature, you may immediately expect to find it in revelation. If carried out to its extreme logical development, it would come to this, that if a catalogue were constructed of all the inexplicable arrangements and difficulties of nature, you might confidently anticipate that these very same difficulties in the same

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<sup>19</sup> The following is a classic example of an Aristotelian deductive argument: All hairy quadrupeds are animals. All horses are hairy quadrupeds. Therefore, all horses are animals. This example is taken from David L. Hull, *Darwin and his Critics: The Reception of Darwin’s Theory of Evolution by the Scientific Community* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), p. 18.

<sup>20</sup> William Paley, *Natural Theology*, ed. by Matthew D. Eddy and David Knight (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. xxi.

<sup>21</sup> Leonard Huxley, *The Life and Letters of Thomas Henry Huxley*, 2nd edn, 3 vols (London: Macmillan, 1903), I, 345–48 (p. 347) (5 May 1863).

degree and in the same points would be found in revelation. Both being from the same Author, it is presumed that each would resemble the other.<sup>22</sup>

Bagehot argues that such a line of reasoning is absurd as it would imply that Divine revelation, rather than providing answers to the problems man has in explaining the natural world, would merely add to them.

Bagehot was one of the four ‘censors’ of Bishop Butler discussed at length by Gladstone in his 1895 article, ‘Bishop Butler and His Censors’.<sup>23</sup> However, Gladstone considered the Unitarian James Martineau to be in the vanguard of the nineteenth-century attack on Butler’s *Analogy*.<sup>24</sup> The work to which Gladstone alludes can be traced to Martineau’s lecture on the Atonement, ‘Inconsistency of the Scheme of Vicarious Redemption’ (1839). This work is relevant to Butler’s ‘Book of the Machines’ as it, too, argues that Bishop Butler’s method employs a false analogy. Martineau does this by demonstrating that the principles of natural religion are inconsistent with the scriptural evidences of revealed religion, and thereby demonstrating that Bishop Butler’s analogy between natural and revealed religion must be a false one. In particular, Martineau considers examples of vicarious punishment, that is, punishment of the innocent for acts of the guilty. Bishop Butler had used such everyday occurrences as an analogy and explanation for the suffering of the innocent Christ to atone for the sins of man (*Analogy*, pp. 229–54). For Martineau, however, such vicarious punishment is the exception rather than rule, and, for him, such an analogy between natural and revealed religion would infer a tyrannical Providence: ‘this is the fatal principle pervading all analogical arguments in defence of Trinitarian Christianity’ and leads to the conclusion ‘that in this universe Justice has no throne’.<sup>25</sup> Butler’s *Analogy* is singled out by Martineau ‘as containing, with a design directly contrary, the most terrible persuasives to Atheism that have ever been produced’ (‘Inconsistency’, pp. 93–94). Such a scheme of vicarious punishment was satirized in *Erewhon*. Illness is treated as a crime, and the sick are punished, whereas criminality is a disease, and is sympathetically treated. Martineau concludes the part of the lecture dealing with the dangers of arguing from false analogy by considering the Atonement as the reversal of Adam’s Fall. Using the example of

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<sup>22</sup> ‘Bishop Butler’, in *Literary Studies*, ed. by Richard Holt Hutton, 2 vols (London: Longmans, Green, 1879), II, 54–105 (p. 90).

<sup>23</sup> The other three were the Unitarian Sara Hennell, Leslie Stephen, and Matthew Arnold.

<sup>24</sup> W. E. Gladstone, ‘Bishop Butler and His Censors’, *Nineteenth Century*, November 1895, pp. 715–39 (p. 715).

<sup>25</sup> ‘Inconsistency of the Scheme of Vicarious Redemption’, in *Studies in Christianity*, pp. 83–146 (p. 93).

infant baptism, he notes that, as far as we can discover from an observation of the natural world, Christ's redemption has had no effect:

Sorrow and toil are the lot of all, as they have been from of old; the baptized infant utters a cry as sad as the unbaptized [...]. And is it presumptuous to reason from the seen to the unseen, from the part which we experience to that which we can only conceive? If the known effects are unredeemed, the suspicion is not unnatural, that so are the unknown. ('Inconsistency', p. 96)

If Butler's analogy is a true one, Martineau thus asks why should we expect redemption in the afterlife, given that we are apparently still in an unredeemed state in this one.

In answer to such charges of faulty analogical reasoning, Bishop Butler's mid-nineteenth-century apologists argued that, when discussing his use of analogy, it was important to realize the object to which the use was aimed. Frequently it was pointed out that he was not trying to prove the truth of Christianity: as has been noted above, he makes it clear at the very beginning of the *Analogy* that he can only demonstrate the probability of it being true. Rather, Bishop Butler uses analogy in order to show that opponents of Christianity cannot prove that it is false.

However, other nineteenth-century apologists sought to recuperate Butler's method in a manner that would shift his argument away from a mere defence against the deists towards a more aggressive assertion of the truth of revealed religion. One such was Renn Dickson Hampden, who was part of the group of 'Noetics' at Oriel College, Oxford, which sought to defend Anglican orthodoxy on the grounds of its 'reasonableness'. Butler's *Analogy* was a key Noetic text. For Hampden, the Scriptures, like the natural world, could be investigated by the method of inductive reasoning.<sup>26</sup> Hampden wrote *An Essay on the Philosophical Evidence of Christianity* (1827) in order to recuperate Butler's work and to bring its weight to bear in favour of asserting the truth of the Scriptures: 'its importance has been limited to the purpose of invalidating objections against Christianity, — its positive subserviency, as an argument to the truth of the religion, being regarded as comparatively little.'<sup>27</sup> Hamish Swanston has written that Hampden 'wondered what would happen in theology if the assumptions of Butler's *Analogy* were taken seriously in an age of vastly increased scientific knowledge', and that 'Hampden looked to Butler for help in bringing theology into harness with observational science. Butler was to make it possible for Baconian method to be employed in

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<sup>26</sup> Richard Brent, 'Hampden, Renn Dickson (1793–1868)', *ODNB* <doi:10.1093/ref:odnb/12171>.

<sup>27</sup> *An Essay on the Philosophical Evidence of Christianity* (London: Murray, 1827), p. vii.



nineteenth century theology.<sup>28</sup> In a subversion of the intentions of Hampden, Samuel Butler applied the assumptions of Bishop Butler's analogical reasoning to the rapidly changing world of technology, to draw his own absurd conclusions about Darwinian evolution, and to highlight the limitations of rationalism.

In 1836, Hampden was involved in a doctrinal controversy that split the Church of England into High Church and liberal Broad Church parties. He advocated the admission of dissenters to Oxford University, and when proposed as Regius Professor of Divinity, was vehemently opposed by the Tractarians Edward Pusey and John Henry Newman. The question of authority divided the various factions of the mid-Victorian Church. The High Church sought to defend the authority of the institution of the Church itself, whilst the Low Church sought authority in the Scriptures. Meanwhile, the liberal Broad Churchmen claimed 'that the only authority lay in private judgement and in the individual conscience which could alone interpret the Scriptures'.<sup>29</sup> This accords with Butler's view of authority residing within the individual, and corroborates his much later assertion in the preface to *Erewhon Revisited* (1901) that 'I would say that I have never ceased to profess myself a member of the more advanced wing of the English Broad Church [...]. When I converse with advanced Broad Churchmen I find myself in substantial harmony with them.'<sup>30</sup> 'Harmony' can be a loaded Butlerian term, but his epistemology was consistent with Broad Church theology, and as I go on to show in Chapter 3 put him at some distance from the self-proclaimed agnostics amongst the men of science.

The 'culmination and final act of the Broad Church movement' was the publication in 1860 of the collection of seven essays as *Essays and Reviews*.<sup>31</sup> Butler's *Analogy* was still the classical defence of orthodoxy, and so it is not surprising that this text was a key target of the essayists.<sup>32</sup> As a result of this attack it was dropped from the Oxford curriculum in 1864, with Gladstone citing Mark Pattison, one of the essayists, and one whose essay focused most closely on the *Analogy*, as a cause (Ellis, p. 274). The

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<sup>28</sup> *Ideas of Order: The Mid-Nineteenth Century Renewal of Anglican Theological Method* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1973), pp. 12, 26.

<sup>29</sup> M. A. Crowther, 'Church Problems and Church Parties', in *Religion in Victorian Britain*, ed. by Gerald Parsons, James R. Moore, and John Wolffe, 5 vols (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998), IV: *Interpretations*, ed. by Gerald Parsons, pp. 4–27 (p. 9).

<sup>30</sup> *Shrewsbury Edition*, ed. by Jones and Bartholomew, XVI: *Erewhon Revisited*, p. xxiv. Further references to this volume are given after quotations in the text and prefixed *ER*.

<sup>31</sup> Josef L. Altholz, 'The Mind of Victorian Orthodoxy: Anglican Responses to 'Essays and Reviews'', 1860–64', in *Religion in Victorian Britain*, ed. by Parsons, Moore, and Wolffe, IV: *Interpretations*, 28–40 (p. 28).

<sup>32</sup> Ieuan Ellis, *Seven Against Christ: A Study of 'Essays and Reviews'* (Leiden: Brill, 1980), pp. 274–75.

work had in fact only been included on the list of required reading at Oxford since 1832, having been introduced by Hampden. Samuel Butler's, then, was not the only attempt at dethroning his namesake. In fact, by the time he came to write 'Darwin Among the Machines' in 1863, his first satirical attack on analogical reasoning, his target was already severely wounded.

Although in the 'Book of the Machines', Butler was ostensibly satirizing Bishop Butler's *Analogy*, the specific analogy he makes between man and machines was also almost certainly prompted by Paley's famous analogy between the watchmaker and God which opens *Natural Theology*. Paley argues that if one found a watch on the ground, and examined its construction, it would be inevitable

that the watch must have had a maker; that there must have existed, at some time and at some place or other, an artificer or artificers who formed it for the purpose which we find it actually to answer; who comprehended its construction, and designed its use. (*Natural Theology*, p. 8)

From this, Paley goes on to draw an analogy with the natural world, and argues that, likewise, one can infer the existence of an intelligent designer by a contemplation of the many contrivances found in nature. Paley's *Evidences of Christianity* was a defence of scriptural authority in the tradition of Butler's *Analogy* but whose object was less wide-ranging in that it was primarily focused on defending the credibility of miracles in the wake of David Hume's sceptical essay 'Of Miracles' included within his *Philosophical Essays Concerning Human Understanding* (1748). *Natural Theology* was also designed, in part, to address Hume's scepticism, set out in his posthumously published *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, that the existence of a divine Creator could be demonstrated using the argument from design (Paley, pp. xii–xiii).

Matthew Eddy and David Knight note that *Natural Theology* was one of the most published books of the nineteenth century (Paley, p. xxix). However, although very popular in the first half of the century, by mid-century its popularity appears to have waned. A twentieth edition had appeared by 1820, and Lord Brougham and Sir Charles Bell, the author of one of the Bridgewater Treatises, published an edition in 1835, but the British Library catalogue lists only five new editions in the second half of the century. In contrast, George Holyoake's pamphlet, *Paley Refuted in His Own Words*, first published in 1847, had reached a sixth edition by 1866. Holyoake was a freethinker who had been imprisoned for blasphemy in 1842. He later published the *Reasoner*, a secularist journal, to which Butler contributed. Holyoake charges Paley with abandoning his analogy between the watchmaker and God 'at the very moment when [its] assistance seemed to

promise curious revelations'.<sup>33</sup> Holyoake, like Butler, pressed Paley's analogy to what he believed to be its logical conclusion. His refutation begins from Paley's premise that God was a person. Indeed, Paley devoted a whole chapter of *Natural Theology* to the 'personality of the Deity', and argues that the existence of contrivance proves this personality: 'that which can contrive, which can design, must be a person' (p. 213). Holyoake asks:

By reasoning from analogy, Paley infers that there is a personal, intelligent being — the author of all design — whom he christens Deity. But what kind of a person is a Deity? If a person, is it organised like a person? Whence came it? How did it originate? Was it formed, as it is said to have formed us? Did an intelligence superior to its own make it, as an intelligence superior to ours is said to have made us? Is Deity composed of flesh and blood as we are — or of what is it composed? These are all questions which a natural curiosity suggests [...]. But they are questions to which Paley has deigned no answer. (p. 19)

Holyoake argues that the attributes Paley ascribes to God, such as omniscience and eternity, are inconsistent with the personality that he displays (p. 35). According to Holyoake, such inconsistencies must arise because Paley's analogy itself is false:

The God of theology being infinite, it is no subject for analogy. Infinite beings can never be proved by it. Long ago Locke said that nothing finite bears any proportion to things infinite [...]. Admitting Paley's Deity to be all that he contends it is [...], such a Deity is insufficient for the purposes of theology, which always requires a *Creator*. Now no conceivable analogy can prove a creation. Creation is without an analogy [...]. No analogy can prove creation, because no analogy can prove what it does not contain, namely an example of creation. The God of natural theology never accounted for the origin of things. The first and greatest difficulty [...], namely, whence came the universe? is just where it was before Paley wrote — still unaccounted for, unillustrated, unexplained. (p. 37, emphasis in original)

Although Butler never acknowledged Holyoake's earlier refutation, when he came to write his series of articles 'God the Known and God the Unknown' for the *Examiner* in 1879, he uses a remarkably similar argument to argue for the absurdity of such an 'impersonal person' as the theistic personal God (see Chapter 3).

The critics of Bishop Butler's *Analogy* had highlighted what they thought to be absurd or unpalatable conclusions that must be inferred if his analogy between natural and revealed religion were a true one. Either that, or his analogy was false; in which case, one could not infer anything of the unseen spiritual world from a consideration of the known natural one. Likewise, Holyoake had argued that if Paley's analogy between

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<sup>33</sup> *Paley Refuted in His Own Words*, 2nd edn (London: Watson, 1848), p. 8.

a watchmaker and a divine Creator were a true one, this too would lead to the unpalatable conclusion that the personality of God was far from divine. By the time *Erewhon* was published in 1872, the evidential theology of Bishop Butler and Paley, which had been the foundation of Anglicanism for decades, had been under attack for many years. Far from being in the vanguard of religious controversy, Butler's heterodoxy was conventional. However, in the next section I show how Butler was able to utilize his consciously false analogical reasoning, similar to arguments used by opponents of Bishop Butler and Paley, in a more original and ludic manner in his article 'Darwin Among the Machines' (1863): original, because the arguments used by men of science against theologians were turned upon themselves to reach similarly absurd conclusions. Nevertheless, what began with a playful exploration of the implications of Darwin's analogical reasoning in the *Origin* would later harden into a more fully theorized Lamarckism. His earlier Pelagianism had been a reaction against the determinism underlying the doctrine of original sin. Similarly, his later adoption of Lamarckism would be a reaction to what he saw as the determinism behind Darwinian natural selection.<sup>34</sup> The primacy of man's desire or will was the principle behind both his eschatological and his evolutionary thought.

### **'Darwin Among the Machines'**

Returning to Butler's letter to Darwin in which he explained that it was the *Analogy* rather than the *Origin* to which the satire in *Erewhon* was aimed, it is apparent that he 'first got hold of the idea' that machines were about to supplant the human race in New Zealand. There, he wrote and published the pseudonymous 'Darwin Among the Machines', one of the three letters that furnished the ideas explored further in the 'Book of the Machines' episode in *Erewhon*. Another of these letters was 'Lucubratio Ebria' (1865) which was written in England on his return, but published, like 'Darwin Among the Machines' in the Christchurch *Press*. The third letter was 'The Mechanical Creation' (1865), published in George Holyoake's *Reasoner*. In these three letters, indicative of his preference for dialogic form as a heuristic tool, Butler proposes two antithetical theories of machines, which formed the basis of the arguments of the machinists and the anti-machinists in the 'Book of the Machines'. The technophobe view is at its most extreme

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<sup>34</sup> Frank Miller Turner, *Between Science and Religion: The Reaction to Scientific Naturalism in Late Victorian England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974), p. 169.

in ‘Darwin Among the Machines’. Here, Butler argues that machines would evolve to such an extent that man would become subservient to them, and concludes that all machinery should thus be destroyed. A similar argument is followed in ‘The Mechanical Creation’ but it falls short of such an extreme conclusion and urges instead man’s easy servitude to machines. In contrast, ‘Lucubratio Ebria’ argues that machines should be viewed merely as ‘extra-corporaneous limbs’ and as the means by which human civilization progresses (*LE*, p. 217). This is the stance adopted by the Erewhonian machinists in the ‘Book of the Machines’.

On his return to England from New Zealand, around the time he was writing ‘Lucubratio Ebria’ and ‘The Mechanical Creation’, Butler betrayed his doubts as to the validity of the analogy between the mechanical and the natural worlds, and, by extension, of the physical basis of psychic phenomena, in a letter to Dr Haast, later Sir Julius Haast, a geologist he had met in New Zealand. He writes: ‘Here are two good titles for mock scientific papers “The Dynamical Theory of Grief” and “The Molecular Action of Thought.” Might not some good nonsense with half sense be written on the subject?’<sup>35</sup> Sadly, Butler’s papers were never written. However, his intention anticipates the Sokal hoax of 1996 in which physicist Alan Sokal wrote an article ‘liberally salted with nonsense’ to the cultural studies journal *Social Text* which sought to highlight the ‘apparent decline in the standards of rigor in certain precincts of the academic humanities’.<sup>36</sup> Butler did, however, publish his satirical conversion text *The Fair Haven* in 1873, which drew a response from the parties taken in by the hoax similar to that of Sokal’s victims in 1996. Butler’s letter to Haast clarifies his views on the organic–mechanical analogy, which, far from being ambivalent as Herbert Sussman has claimed, are decidedly sceptical.<sup>37</sup>

In ‘Darwin Among the Machines’, Butler uses his consciously specious analogy to draw inductive conclusions about the unknown future based on observation of the known past, employing material drawn from Darwin’s *Origin* and Paley’s *Natural Theology*. He observes that in the past ‘the vegetable kingdom was slowly developed from the mineral, and [...] in like manner the animal supervened upon the vegetable’.<sup>38</sup> From

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<sup>35</sup> Quoted in Jones, *Memoir*, I, 116–17 (p. 117) (14 February 1865).

<sup>36</sup> Alan Sokal, ‘A Physicist Experiments with Cultural Studies’  
<<http://linguafranca.mirror.theinfo.org/9605/sokal.html>> [accessed 7 September 2012].

<sup>37</sup> Sussman, *Victorians and the Machine*, p. 138.

<sup>38</sup> ‘Darwin Among the Machines’, in *Shrewsbury Edition*, ed. by Jones and Bartholomew, I: *A First Year in Canterbury Settlement*, 208–13 (pp. 208–09). Further references to this letter are given after quotations in the text and prefixed *DM*.

such historic progressive evolution, and from his observation of the rapid development of machines, he goes on to infer that, in the future, ‘man will have become to the machine what the horse and the dog are to man’ (*DM*, p. 211). Notwithstanding his assertion that the *Origin* was not the target of his satire, he nevertheless uses phraseology lifted almost directly from the *Origin*’s conclusion:

If we revert to the earliest primordial types of mechanical life, to the lever, the wedge, the inclined plane, the screw, and the pulley, or (for analogy would lead us one step further) to that one primordial type from which all the mechanical kingdom has been developed, we mean to the lever itself, and if we then examine the machinery of the *Great Eastern*, we find ourselves almost awestruck at the vast development of the mechanical world.<sup>39</sup>

Compare this with Darwin’s conclusion:

I believe that animals have descended from at most only four or five progenitors, and plants from an equal or lesser number. Analogy would lead me one step further, namely, to the belief that all animals and plants have descended from some one prototype. (*Origin of Species*, p. 484)

Not only does Butler draw directly on the examples Darwin used in the *Origin*, he also seems to satirize Darwin himself. The author of the ‘Book of the Machines’, translated and abridged by the anonymous narrator in *Erewhon*, is a thinly disguised portrait of Darwin. Having had to gloss over ‘a very long and untranslatable digression about the different races and families of the then existing machines’, the narrator writes that the technophobic author ‘attempted to support his theory by pointing out the similarities existing between many machines of a widely different character, which served to show descent from a common ancestor’ (*E*, p. 214). In a reference to the incompleteness of the fossil record, acknowledged by Darwin, and which was used as an attempt to refute his theory, he goes on to prove that there were many links between machines apparently dissimilar, and many more that have perished. Finally the narrator points out the ‘tendencies to reversion, and the presence of rudimentary organs’ which ‘serv[e] to mark descent from an ancestor to whom the function was actually useful’ (*E*, p. 214). Both these phrases were taken directly from the *Origin* (pp. 15, 453). Butler, therefore, is somewhat disingenuous in his assertion that the *Origin* was not the target of his satire. Breuer has written that it was some time after 1874 when Butler first realized that Darwin, as well as Bishop Butler, was guilty of faulty analogical reasoning (‘Samuel Butler’s “The Book of the Machines”’, p. 376). However, even if the *Origin* was not

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<sup>39</sup> *DM*, p. 208. The *Great Eastern* was topical at the time. Launched in 1858, it was then the largest ship ever built.

Butler's primary target, he certainly used Darwin's examples and ideas as the basis for his argument to push them to what he believed to be an absurd conclusion.

As has already been suggested, Paley's *Natural Theology*, with which Butler would have been very familiar, was also a target. In *Evolution, Old and New*, Butler maintains that he had forgotten this work's existence until reminded of it by Sir William Thomson in his address to the British Association in 1871, which was around the time he was writing *Erewhon* (EON, p. 10). Despite the desuetude into which Paley's natural theology had fallen in theological debate, his analogy between the natural and the mechanical worlds was still in wide currency, in both the popular and specialist scientific literature. In 1863, Richard Owen published a monograph on the aye-aye, a species of lemur, in which he argues for a divine designer, using just such an analogy. On account of its perfectly adapted digits and teeth to feed on wood-boring grubs, he describes the aye-aye as a 'correlated organic machine'. Like 'Paley and the pure teleologist', he contrasts machines designed by man unfavourably with the designs of God, in which 'we seem to discern the exercise of like faculties in a transcendently higher degree'.<sup>40</sup>

Famously, Thomas Huxley went one step further than Paley and Owen in his hypothesis that the organic and mechanical realms were not merely analogous, but that 'man is a conscious automaton'.<sup>41</sup> This in turn had deterministic implications for the mind-body relationship. For Huxley, 'the feeling we call volition is not the cause of a voluntary act, but the symbol of that state of the brain which is the immediate cause of that act' (p. 244). Physical changes in the brain are therefore the cause of action, and what we think of as states of consciousness, such as volition, are merely epiphenomena of these changes. As I go on to show, volition is central to Butler's thought because, for him, desire is the immediate cause of action, not an epiphenomenon, and structures develop or actions become instinctive through repeated use over the course of many generations. Moreover, just as for Butler the primacy of volition as a causal agent linked his eschatological and evolutionary thought, so for Huxley, in a typically rhetorical flourish, he adduces support for his deterministic hypothesis from predestinarian theologians such as Calvin and St Augustine (p. 246).

The organic-mechanical analogy, then, had a multivalency that could be appropriated for a variety of ideological purposes. In the conclusion to the *Origin*,

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<sup>40</sup> *Monograph on the Aye-Aye* (London: Taylor and Francis, 1863), p. 60.

<sup>41</sup> 'On the Hypothesis that Animals are Automata, and its History', in *Collected Essays*, 9 vols (London: Macmillan, 1901), I: *Methods and Results*, 199–250 (p. 246).

Darwin had used it as a means by which to comprehend the mysteries of the natural world, whilst Paley and Owen used it to demonstrate the superiority of God's attributes via his anthropomorphization as the divine designer. Butler, on the other hand, was able to misuse the analogy speciously in order to draw what he believed to be the absurd conclusion in the 'Book of the Machines' that the evolution of machines would eventually render man extinct. And for Huxley, the analogy hardened into an identity that allowed him to posit a mechanism for all action that relegated volition to a role analogous to that of the steam-whistle in relation to a locomotive, having no effect at all on the machinery (p. 240).

Although Herbert Sussman has detected an ambivalence in the Victorian literary response to the machine, he is nevertheless able to assert that 'whatever consistency may be found [...] lies not so much in a dislike of technology as in a more general opposition to mechanistic modes of thought' (*Victorians and the Machine*, p. 8). As I have argued above, Butler, too, shared this distaste for determinism in both his Pelagianism and in his later opposition to what he believed to be the determinism of Darwinian natural selection. In this, he was therefore within a broad philosophical mainstream. However, what distinguishes him from other writers at the time, and reveals the originality within his conventionality, is the imaginative manner in which he was able to overturn conclusions drawn from the organic-mechanical analogy.

If the conventional interpretation of the analogy was to view the natural, organic world as subject to mechanistic laws, surely it was possible to invert the causal relationship and view machines as living. Butler considers the implications of this in the 'Book of the Machines'. Tamara Ketabgian has argued that in 'defining the human not as opposed to the machine but as a type of machine, Butler's technophobe and technophile narrow the difference between them to "one rather of degree than of kind"', and that '*Erewhon* [thereby] lampoons efforts to purify the human'.<sup>42</sup> I, too, contend that Butler came to appreciate that the boundaries between the animate and the inanimate were contestable, that within the inanimate were found harmonics of the animate and vice versa. But this inability to isolate an essence of humanness is only one manifestation of Butler's wider project to show that all categories include elements of their opposite. The ideas he explored in the 'Book of the Machines' led to the panpsychism he adopted in 1880, which I discuss in Chapter 3. Before he is able to reach this conclusion,

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<sup>42</sup> *The Lives of Machines: The Industrial Imaginary in Victorian Literature and Culture* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2011), p. 31.



however, he must confront the aspects of disanalogy that opponents of a mechanistic view of life put forward: self-reproduction, consciousness, and free will. If machines cannot reproduce, if they cannot exercise free will, if they do not exhibit what we recognize as consciousness, how can man be regarded as a machine?

### **The ‘Book of the Machines’: Reproduction, consciousness, and free will**

In *Unconscious Memory*, Butler explains his belief that there is no definite boundary between the organic and the inorganic:

The only thing of which I am sure is, that the distinction between the organic and the inorganic is arbitrary; that it is more coherent with our other ideas, and therefore more acceptable, to start with every molecule as a living thing, and then deduce death as the breaking up of an association or corporation, than to start with inanimate molecules and smuggle life into them; and that, therefore, what we call the inorganic world must be regarded as up to a certain point living, and instinct, within certain limits, with consciousness, volition, and power of concerted action. It is only of late, however, that I have come to this opinion. (*UM*, p. 16)

*Unconscious Memory* was not published until 1880, eighteen years after his first writings on evolution. He may have come to this view only recently but the germs can be detected in the ‘Book of the Machines’.

At the opening of this episode the author questions the idea that consciousness is unique to man. He hypothesizes that if man had existed on the primeval earth, before the advent of any organic life, ‘would he not have pronounced it impossible that creatures possessed of anything like consciousness should be evolved from the seeming cinder which he was beholding?’ (*E*, p. 198). By analogy, he argues that just because machines do not appear to possess consciousness at present, one cannot therefore conclude that they will never possess it in the future, in their more highly evolved state. If one assumes that conscious animate life evolved from unconscious inanimate life, there is no *a priori* reason why consciousness should not evolve in the currently unconscious machines. Darwin’s image of the ‘entangled bank’ in the last paragraph of the *Origin* is taken up by the writer when he asks, rhetorically, ‘Where does consciousness begin, and where end? [...]. Is not everything interwoven with everything? Is not machinery linked with animal life in an infinite variety of ways?’ (*E*, p. 199).

Discussing insectivorous plants, the technophobe professor attempts to answer this question, and speculates as to how so ostensibly unconscious an organism as a plant is able to differentiate between flies and raindrops, responding to the touch of the former but ignoring the repeated contact of the latter: ‘Curious! that so unconscious a thing should have such a keen eye to its own interest. If this is unconsciousness, where is the use of consciousness?’ (*E*, p. 200). In his later work, *Insectivorous Plants* (1875), Darwin discusses the movement of the glands of the insectivorous *Drosera* when excited by repeated contact and acknowledges that such action appears to be conscious, but writes that ‘strictly speaking, the glands ought to be called irritable, as the term sensitive generally implies consciousness; but no one supposes that the Sensitive-plant is conscious, and as I have found the term convenient, I shall use it without scruple’.<sup>43</sup> Rather than relying on the empirical evidence of the apparent consciousness of the plant, Darwin here makes an emphatic *a priori* assumption that the plant is not conscious. But it is the term’s very ‘convenience’ that for the pragmatic Butler is evidence that the plant is conscious. Before a jury of common men, the plant would be deemed to be conscious, simply because it acts as if it is. In contrast, the Erewhonian professor makes an analogy between humans and the plant on the basis that they both respond in a similar way to a similar desire. He concludes, therefore, that either consciousness is common to both plants and humans, or it is possessed by neither, and that they both act mechanically: ‘If it seems to us that the plant kills and eats a fly mechanically, may it not seem to the plant that a man must kill and eat a sheep mechanically?’ (*E*, p. 200).

Darwin would, however, use much more cautious language when writing about the consciousness of plants in one of his later works, *The Power of Movement in Plants* (1880):

It is impossible not to be struck with the *resemblance* between the foregoing movements of plants and many of the actions performed unconsciously by the lower animals [...]. The habit of moving at certain periods is inherited both by plants and animals.<sup>44</sup>

After observing the remarkable effects that stimulus of the radicle (the primary root of a seedling) has on remote parts of the plant, Darwin closes his work by arguing that

It is hardly an exaggeration to say that the tip of the radicle [...] acts *like* the brain of one of the lower animals; the brain being seated within the anterior end of the body, receiving impressions from the sense-organs, and directing the several movements. (p. 573, emphasis added)

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<sup>43</sup> *Insectivorous Plants* (London: Murray, 1875), p. 19.

<sup>44</sup> *The Power of Movement in Plants* (London: Murray, 1880), pp. 571–72, emphasis added.

The obvious implication Darwin wishes his reader to draw from both these passages is that the consciousness of plants is only apparent. In the 'Book of the Machines', the Erewhonian professor makes a similar observation of the potato, noting its 'low cunning', but, in contrast to Darwin, he does so with the intention of demonstrating that the potato possesses actual consciousness:

Even a potato in a dark cellar has a certain low cunning about him which serves him in excellent stead. He knows perfectly well what he wants and how to get it. He sees the light coming from the cellar window and sends his shoots crawling straight thereto. (*E*, pp. 200–01)

Again, he argues by analogy with humans that if the movement of the potato is deemed merely chemical and mechanical, then why should we not consider all movement, including that of humans, as being so.

That Butler does not concur with such a deduction is illustrated by the rhetoric in which the professor's argument is framed, which employs phrases almost identical to those in his letter to Haast, quoted above, in which he mocked the mechanistic view of life: should 'there be not a molecular action of thought, whence a dynamical theory of the passions shall be deducible?' (*E*, p. 201). However, the origins of Butler's later panpsychism can be detected in the conclusion drawn by the professor: either seemingly mechanical and unconscious action must contain more 'elements of consciousness' than hitherto thought; or, assuming the theory of evolution, consciousness has somehow evolved out of a remote unconscious ancestor (*E*, p. 202). As noted above, by the time Butler came to write *Unconscious Memory*, he had decided that it was easier to assume that consciousness was present, to a greater or lesser degree, in all matter than it was to assume that it could have evolved out of unconsciousness.

The analogy between the movement of an unconscious plant and a conscious lower animal allows the professor to infer that there is no *a priori* reason that machines should not develop consciousness even if they did not at present possess it. However, a major stumbling block undermining the validity of the analogy between humans and machines, acknowledged by the professor, is the absence of a system of reproduction within machines, which are thereby dependent on humans for their manufacture. An analogy with the natural world would, nevertheless, allow him to circumvent this difficulty. A reproductive system does not necessarily have to reside within the organism. The professor asks:

Does any one say that the red clover has no reproductive system because the humble bee (and the humble bee only) must aid and abet it before it can

reproduce? No one. The humble bee is a part of the reproductive system of the clover. (*E*, p. 211)

This example is taken directly from the *Origin*. There, Darwin wrote:

Humble-bees alone visit the common red clover [...], as other bees cannot reach the nectar. Hence I have very little doubt, that if the whole genus of humble-bees became extinct or very rare in England, [...] red clover would become very rare, or wholly disappear. (pp. 73–74)

The Erewhonian professor uses exactly the same example to argue that the reproduction of the red clover is entirely dependent on the exogenous bee, as the reproduction of the machine is entirely dependent on the exogenous human. The absence of a fully internal system of reproduction does not therefore preclude machines from being considered organic.

The professor uses a similar line of reasoning to meet objections that machines do not exhibit free will, in that they merely follow fixed mechanistic laws. He argues that humans only appear to have free will because of our ignorance of the much more complex causes that lead them to act in the ways that they do. In contrast, we can predict how machines will behave because we know precisely the laws under which they act. If we had perfect knowledge of all the forces acting on a human at any one time, we would know precisely how they would act too (*E*, pp. 215–16). This plea to ignorance as the instrument by which necessity masquerades as free will is very similar to that used by Darwin when he strove to explain the mechanism by which those chance variations occurred upon which natural selection acted. He writes, ‘I have hitherto sometimes spoken as if the variations [...] had been due to chance. This, of course, is a wholly incorrect expression, but it serves to acknowledge plainly our ignorance of the cause of each particular variation’ (*Origin*, p. 131). Nevertheless, as is suggested by the title of the chapter from which this quotation is taken, there are ‘laws of variation’ which act, despite our ignorance of them. For the Erewhonian professor, the apparent spontaneity of humans is only due to our similar ignorance of the interplay of the many laws acting upon them. In this sense, machines are no different from humans.

Darwin’s plea to ignorance is, in fact, the plea used by Bishop Butler in demonstrating the credibility of Christianity. The Bishop argues that we assume that ‘the whole common course of nature is carried on according to general fore-ordained laws’, notwithstanding the fact that we are entirely ignorant ‘by what laws, storms and tempests, earthquakes, famine, pestilence, become the instruments of destruction of mankind’. He goes on to write that ‘these laws are so wholly unknown to us, that we call

the events which come to pass by them, accidental: though all reasonable men know certainly, that there cannot, in reality, be any such thing as chance'. From such an inference that these chance events are in fact the result of general, albeit unknown, laws, he argues by analogy that there is no *a priori* reason why biblical miracles should not also be the result of 'general laws of wisdom' (Joseph Butler, *Analogy*, pp. 223–24). Samuel Butler, therefore, in arguing that humans, like machines, are acting under similar, although unknown, laws, and that neither humans nor machines have free will, utilizes in a satirical manner, the same line of argument used by the Bishop to argue for the credibility of miracles.

Butler devotes much of the 'Book of the Machines' to the views of the anti-machinist professor. He demonstrates that it is credible that consciousness could evolve in machines, just as it has evolved in the past from inanimate and seemingly unconscious objects. He highlights the parallels between the behaviour of unconscious plants and conscious man, and thus blurs the boundary of consciousness. Utilizing analogical reasoning he argues that the absence of an internal reproductive system does not preclude machines from being considered organic. He goes on to demonstrate that man, as well as machines, can be considered as having no free will. In this manner, the professor argues that the analogy between the organic and the mechanical realms is valid, and uses this analogy to draw his apocalyptic conclusion. The views of his machinist opponent are given relatively little space, but in the next section I show how they would be developed in Butler's later writings to form the foundation of his challenge to the authority of scientific naturalism.

### **'Lucubratio Ebria': Towards Lamarckism**

Both 'Darwin Among the Machines' and 'The Mechanical Creation' argue that machines will eventually evolve to such an advanced state that man will become subservient. 'Lucubratio Ebria', the second of Butler's letters to the *Christchurch Press* puts forward a more benign alternative, which was incorporated into the views of the Erewhonian machinist. The letter was published on 29 July 1865, and it purports to answer, in part, 'Darwin Among the Machines' published two years previously. It can thus be read as part of Butler's dialogism, in which he conducts arguments with himself and weighs the evidence, as in a court of law, in order to arrive at the most convenient interpretation of the facts that Darwin presents. Whereas in the earlier letter Butler had

satirized the use of false analogy and faulty scientific reasoning, in ‘Lucubratio Ebria’, the analogy made, and the conclusions drawn, were those he favoured. This assertion is corroborated by an entry in his notebooks made towards the end of his life in which he lists his most ‘interesting’ finds. The second of these is the analogy he made ‘between the development of the organs of our bodies and of those which are not incorporate with our bodies and which we call tools or machines’ (*NB*, pp. 382–83). It is important to stress that the analogy is between the *development* of organs and tools, and not of organs and tools themselves. This emphasis on the process of evolution appears to be the first example in his writings of the Lamarckian theory that would be developed further in his four evolutionary works, *Life and Habit*, *Evolution*, *Old and New*, *Unconscious Memory*, and *Luck, or Cunning?*, published between 1878 and 1887, and Amigoni has rightly suggested that the letter is ‘Lamarckian without recognizing itself as such’.<sup>45</sup> An examination of this analogy, and the conclusions that were drawn from it may, therefore, illuminate by contrast what Butler considered to be the false analogy of ‘Darwin Among the Machines’, and why he came to prefer a Lamarckian to a Darwinian evolutionary mechanism.

Despite his assertion that the analogy between the development of organs and of tools is a true one, ‘Lucubratio Ebria’ nevertheless sustains the ludic register that pervaded ‘Darwin Among the Machines’. As its Latin title suggests, the ideas it puts forward came about ostensibly during a whisky-induced dream. Such a distancing is cast in terms that mock the divine inspiration, and hence authority, of the Scriptures, and, by implication, Butler’s own authority. As has been shown, the basis for scriptural authority was an issue as topical at the time as evolution. Butler writes that ‘whether it be the inspiration of the drink [...] we are certainly liable about this time to such a prophetic influence as we seldom else experience’ (*LE*, p. 214).

Butler enters into dialogue with his earlier article when he lays out his alternative view of machines:

It is a mistake [...] to take the view adopted by a previous correspondent of this paper, to consider the machines as identities, to animalize them and to anticipate their final triumph over mankind. They are to be regarded as the mode of development by which human organism is most especially advancing, and every fresh invention is to be considered as an additional member of the resources of the human body. (*LE*, p. 217)

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<sup>45</sup> Amigoni, ““The written symbol extends infinitely””, in *Victorian Against the Grain*, ed. by Paradis, p. 103.

The development of machines proceeds in a manner similar to that of the breeding of domestic animals, that is, by artificial selection, and this reflects the desires of man. This can be contrasted with the chance variations upon which Darwinian natural selection acts. So, given that this similarity is valid, and given also the validity of the analogy between the development of machines and organs, Butler drew a conclusion, a few years after the publication of 'Lucubratio Ebria', that became the foundation of his later Lamarckian evolutionary theories. In *Unconscious Memory*, he describes the thought process by which he arrived at it:

In 1870 and 1871, when I was writing *Erewhon*, I thought the best way of looking at machines was to see them as limbs which we had made and carried about with us or left at home at pleasure [...]. The use of the word 'organ' for a limb told its own story; the word could not have become so current under this meaning unless the idea of a limb as a tool or machine had been agreeable to common sense. What would follow, then, if we regarded our limbs and organs as things that we had ourselves manufactured for our convenience? (*UM*, pp. 17–18)

The conclusion Butler draws from this reasoning is that since we are not consciously aware of manufacturing our limbs, we must have manufactured them unconsciously by habit. But habit implies that we have performed a task many times in the past. From this, he reasons that we must share a commonality of personal identity with our ancestors. Over thousands of generations we have therefore acquired the habit of manufacturing our own limbs. Given his familiarity with the *Analogy*, it is likely that he was also aware of Bishop Butler's sermon, 'Of Personal Identity', which was often included in editions of the *Analogy*. In this, Bishop Butler argues, against Locke, for the unity and permanence of personality throughout one's life: 'by reflecting upon that, which is my self now, and that, which was my self twenty years ago, I discern that they are not two, but one and the same self' (Joseph Butler, *Analogy*, p. 358). Samuel Butler would press this line of argument to what he believed to be its logical conclusion. If this is true, he argues, then it must also be true that a baby may claim personal identity with the impregnate ovum, and hence with its parents, and therefore, 'by parity of reasoning each living form now on the earth must be able to claim identity with each generation of its ancestors up to the primordial cell inclusive' (*UM*, p. 18). It is from such commonality of personal identity from the primordial cell onwards that the habit derives by which we unconsciously manufacture our own limbs, during our embryonic development, just as we consciously manufacture our tools and machines.

Butler's analogy then, posited initially in 'Lucubratio Ebria', between the development of organs and of machines, eventually allowed him to formulate his theory that memory and heredity are essentially synonymous. This theory was first published in his initial serious evolutionary work, *Life and Habit* and was based upon four principles:

The oneness of personality between parents and offspring; memory on the part of offspring of certain actions which it did when in the persons of its forefathers; the latency of that memory until it is rekindled by a recurrence of the associated ideas; and the unconsciousness with which habitual actions come to be performed. (*UM*, p. 21)

Given that humans develop machines in order to satisfy their desires, the analogy thereby suggests that man has similarly evolved by also exercising volition. It follows that the analogy was the foundation for the Lamarckian evolutionary ideas with which he would challenge the authority of Darwinian natural selection, and, by extension, the emergent scientific naturalism which drew upon Darwinism as one of its main supports. Moreover, by reclaiming man's volition as the agent of evolutionary change, as an alternative to Darwin's chance variations, he was able, as Bernard Lightman has noted, to utilize 'Paley's analogical reasoning from contrived machine to designed nature', whilst also excluding the guiding hand of Paley's divine Creator from his evolutionary scheme.<sup>46</sup> It is in such a context that Lightman is able to suggest that Butler is 'one of the last great natural theologians of the nineteenth century' ("A Conspiracy of One", p. 138). However, I would suggest further that the casting of man as the designer in Butler's own natural theology has more far-reaching implications. In the same way as Paley inferred the attributes of God from a consideration of the natural world He created, so Butler inferred the attributes of the man from his own creation, that is, his own body. Beauty and good health were thus evidence of desirable moral attributes and good breeding. It is also a short step from viewing the machines and tools man invents as 'extra-corporaneous limbs' to viewing his artistic and literary creations likewise. Butler's own natural theology, as set out in 'Lucubratio Ebria' in 1865, thus laid the foundations for his aesthetics and his art and literary criticism that occupied the last two decades of his life. As I go on to show in the next chapter, it was also the basis of his attack on Darwin's moral character. Through his close reading of the *Origin of Species*, Butler detected what he believed to be the sophistries and subterfuges by which Darwin intended to fool his readers into believing that his theory was entirely original.

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<sup>46</sup> Lightman, "A Conspiracy of One", in *Victorian Against the Grain*, ed. by Paradis, p. 127.



## **Chapter 2**

### **Butler and Scientific Naturalism**

Having decided against a career in the Church in favour of sheep farming in New Zealand, Butler left England on 30 September 1859, just eight weeks before the publication of Darwin's *Origin of Species*, which he read in New Zealand. In this chapter I begin by examining the newspaper article in which he first discusses the *Origin*. I show that this was in fact sympathetic to Darwin's theory, but, nevertheless, in it and the ensuing correspondence are to be found the germs of some of the major preoccupations of Butler's serious evolutionary writings published after the satire of *Erewhon*, and in which he would excoriate both Darwin's science and his morality. This particular shift in Butler's opinion of Darwin and his work was both constitutive of and consequent upon a more general deterioration in the standing in which he held the authority of scientific naturalism in particular, and of professionals in general. I go on to discuss how his acrimonious dispute with Darwin in 1879 and 1880 over Ernst Krause's biography of Erasmus Darwin contributed to this deterioration, and how it illuminates the methods used by the new scientific elite to construct and defend their authority. In this discussion I draw upon the work of Robert Merton in which he shows how the values of originality and humility were essential to the establishment of scientific authority. Butler believed that Krause's work had deliberately set out to undermine his own scientific authority, and in the penultimate section I show, using Miranda Fricker's concept of 'epistemic injustice', how the newly professionalized scientific establishment attempted to exclude non-scientists such as Butler from intervening in scientific debate by impugning their credibility and how Butler sought to wrest authority from it. Finally, I return to Butler's specific critique of Darwin's rhetorical method in which he attempts to demonstrate that Darwin's reputation for originality and humility, on which his authority was based, was a carefully crafted self-image, which was useful in appealing both to professional scientists and to the general public. In this critique, the terms of the debate shift from a consideration of the science to one of morality, thus demonstrating the persistence of traditional gentlemanly virtue as a prerequisite of cultural authority amongst even the emergent scientific professionals who had abjured the scientific status of the earlier amateur gentlemen-naturalists. The chapter also traces the generic shift in Butler's writing away from the satire of his early letters and *Erewhon* towards works more serious and recognizably scientific in form. That these later works were not taken wholly

seriously is a measure of the indelibility of Butler's self-fashioning as a satirist, and of a more general indication of the role of the reader in conferring authority upon the author.

### **Butler's 'Dialogue' and responses**

Butler's first published response to Darwin's *Origin*, prior to the implications he would pursue in 'Darwin Among the Machines' and 'Lucubratio Ebria', was a pseudonymous article written in 1862 for the Christchurch *Press*, entitled 'Darwin on the Origin of Species: A Dialogue'. Just as Butler would later explore the implications of the organic-mechanical analogy in *Erewhon* via a dialogue between a technophile and technophobe, so this article examines the main points of Darwin's theory via a dialogue between a supporter of Darwin and a sceptic. A copy was sent to Darwin, who was so impressed that he forwarded it to the editor of an unknown periodical in the hope that it would be published in England as well as in New Zealand.<sup>1</sup> Although the 'Dialogue' was supportive of the *Origin*, as Darwin's response attests, it rehearses several of the main arguments used by Butler in the more extended criticism of Darwin's rhetoric set out in his later works.

The 'Dialogue' opens with the sceptic complaining of Darwin's 'dry reasoning', that the *Origin* is 'hard and logical', and confessing that 'I have found it a great effort to read him through' (*DOS*, p. 188). The supporter of Darwin responds that this difficulty is due more to the sceptic's superficial knowledge of natural history than with the book itself: 'you are constantly baffled by terms of which you do not understand the meaning'; whilst acknowledging that it is, nevertheless, 'hard and laborious reading' (p. 189). This point raises the issue of the trend towards a growing specialization in the sciences, which would contribute towards the widening gap between the professional man of science and the general public. As will be shown, it was Butler's lack of formal scientific training, which, in the eyes of some of his critics, disqualified him from intervening in evolutionary debate. In the correspondence in the *Press* that followed publication of the 'Dialogue', Butler defends Darwin's 'theory of natural development of species' on the basis that it was 'arrived at by a man of known scientific attainments after years of patient toil' (*DOS*, p. 204). The key term here is 'toil', with the implication that scientific authority derives from the physical labour of the trained experimentalist and observer of

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<sup>1</sup> Darwin to unidentified editor, 24 March [1863?], *DCP* <<http://www.darwinproject.ac.uk/entry-4058>> [accessed 8 September 2012].

nature, rather than from the empirically untested ratiocinations of the philosopher or speculator. Again, I return to this point later in the chapter, as such a distinction was used, by Thomas Huxley in particular, as Paul White has shown, to disenfranchise non-practitioners such as Butler from engaging in scientific debate (White, p. 95). As the 'Dialogue' suggests however, Butler believed that scientific knowledge could be attained by the layman, but only as a result of replicating the 'patient toil' of the man of science in his reading practice.

The supporter goes on to praise the clarity of Darwin's prose style which lacks 'all ornament' and is characterized by a 'judicial calmness': Darwin's 'lawyer-like faculty of swearing both sides of a question and attaching the full value to both [...] is essential for any really valuable and scientific investigation' (*DOS*, p. 189). Of the objections to the theory, he writes that Darwin treats them with 'admirable candour' (p. 195). In his later works, Butler would condemn Darwin's prose style as being anything but clear, and believed that this obfuscation was a deliberate ploy to conceal from his readers the fact that he did not actually subscribe to the theory that he had set before them. Furthermore, he would adduce the space devoted to his opponents' more trivial objections as a deliberate strategy by which to win the trust of his readers, whilst at the same time choosing to ignore the more important challenges. Darwin's candour was one of the qualities highlighted most often by his supporters, whereas for Butler, it was his lack of candour that formed one of the bases of his *ad hominem* attack much later.

Butler's 'Dialogue' itself provoked a pseudonymous response attacking Darwinian evolution entitled 'Barrel-Organs', which in turn led to a lively debate in the correspondence pages of the Christchurch *Press* between the two parties. Butler suspected that the Bishop of Wellington had written the article.<sup>2</sup> 'Barrel-Organs' and the ensuing correspondence are worth examining in some detail as they adumbrate two key issues that are central to Butler's later work. First, in 'Barrel-Organs', Darwin is accused of recycling the ideas about evolution of his grandfather, Erasmus Darwin. Of the 'Darwinian theory of the development of species by natural selection', the Bishop writes that

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<sup>2</sup> In a letter to Darwin dated 1 October 1865, Butler discloses his suspicion that the Bishop of Wellington was the author of 'Barrel-Organs'. This letter is reprinted in *DOS*, pp. 186–87. David Amigoni has suggested that the author may have been, in fact, Butler himself (*Colonies*, p. 152). Although this is an intriguing suggestion, and entirely in keeping with Butler's playfulness, the familiarity of the writer of 'Barrel-Organs' with the works of Buffon or Erasmus Darwin would appear to rule out Butler. If his later accounts are to be believed, he did not read the earlier evolutionists until late 1877 and early 1878, that is, when he was finishing *Life and Habit* and starting *Evolution, Old and New*. See *UM*, pp. 26–32, and *LC*, pp. 7–10.

this is nothing new, but a *réchauffée* of the old story that his namesake, Dr. Darwin, served up in the end of the last century to Priestley and his admirers, and Lord Monboddo had cooked in the beginning of the same century. (DOS, p. 196)

Although the Bishop does not accuse Charles Darwin of plagiarism directly, merely of recycling a discredited speculative hypothesis, one of Butler's later charges was that Darwin had not acknowledged his debt to the earlier evolutionists, Buffon, Lamarck, and Erasmus Darwin, in the *Origin*. The Bishop quotes a passage in which Darwin argues that there is no reason why bears, via natural selection, should not evolve into whales, and then notes that in his *Histoire Naturelle*, Buffon had argued that exactly the same transformation over time was possible (DOS, p. 205). Butler admits 'that Dr. Darwin had to a certain extent forestalled Mr. C. Darwin's stand', but that this does not necessarily prove that Charles Darwin's theory is incorrect. He asks

Was there ever a great theory yet which was not more or less developed from previous speculations which were all to a certain extent wrong, and all ridiculed [...] at the time of their appearance? There is a wide difference between a speculation and a theory. A speculation involves the notion of a man climbing into a lofty position, and descrying a somewhat remote object which he cannot fully make out. A theory implies that the theorist has looked long and steadfastly till he is clear in his own mind concerning the nature of the thing which he is beholding. (DOS, p. 203)

Once again, Butler is defending Darwin the theorist on the basis of the 'patient toil' of his long and steadfast observation of the natural world. As will be demonstrated below, he poses an identical question, and offers a similar answer, via the two epigraphs to *Unconscious Memory* (1880). Such a distinction drawn by Butler between hazy speculation and long-reflected demonstration based on careful observation (coupled with experimentation) was crucial to several of the nineteenth-century controversies regarding intellectual property rights over nascent theories, and which centred on the claims and contestations of scientific authority.

The second aspect of 'Barrel-Organs' and the ensuing correspondence of relevance to his later evolutionary works is Butler's reference to the then recent dispute between Thomas Huxley and Richard Owen over natural selection at the Cambridge meeting of the British Association in 1862. Butler writes that

I am not adducing Professor Huxley's advocacy as proof that Darwin is right (indeed, Owen opposed him tooth and nail), but as a proof that there is sufficient to be said on Darwin's side to demand more respectful attention than your last writer [that is, the Bishop] has thought it worth while to give it. (DOS, p. 200)

He goes on to distinguish between the legitimate, albeit sometimes conflicting, views of naturalists and those of laymen, and argues that the dispute over the veracity of Darwin's theory will be decided by the former rather than the latter:

Whether it is true or no can be decided only among naturalists themselves. We are outsiders, and most of us must be content to sit on the stairs till the great men come forth and give us the benefit of their opinion. (p. 201)

However, Butler is here demonstrating what Alvin Goldman has termed the 'novice/two-expert problem'.<sup>3</sup> It is one thing for a layman to defer to the authority of experts, but if the testimony of two experts, in this case, Huxley and Owen, disagree, how is a layman, such as Butler, to decide who is correct in adjudicating on Darwin's theory of natural selection? As I go on to discuss in Chapter 3, biblical critics had addressed the problem of adjudicating between contradictory testimonies in their examination of the gospels. Leaving aside the epistemological issues involved in solving this problem, such a deference to the expert opinions of naturalists would contrast sharply with the democratizing rhetoric of Butler's later works in which he appealed to the commonsensical authority of the general reader rather than to the arguments of the expert men of science, which were, in his view, clouded in obfuscatory fog. Such deference is stated in terms very similar to those in which Huxley concluded his review of the *Origin* in *Macmillan's Magazine* in December 1859, a publication which we know reached Butler in New Zealand: 'the question [of whether Darwin's hypothesis is true] is one to be settled only by the painstaking, truth-loving investigation of skilled naturalists. It is the duty of the general public to await the result in patience.'<sup>4</sup>

In conclusion, therefore, these early exchanges in the *Christchurch Press* formed the basis of some of Butler's more important ideas that were developed in his later works. Given his apparent unfamiliarity with the works of the earlier evolutionists, it appears that 'Barrel-Organs' first acquainted him with the view that Charles may have adopted, without acknowledgement, the ideas of his grandfather Erasmus. The charge of plagiarism would become a key part of his attack on the younger Darwin in *Unconscious Memory* (1880) and *Luck, or Cunning* (1887). His allusion to the Huxley–Owen controversy alerts us to the fact that Butler was at least exposed to debates surrounding the importance of method in the discovery of scientific knowledge, even if at this time he did

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<sup>3</sup> Alvin Goldman, 'Experts: Which Ones Should You Trust?', *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 63 (2001), 85–110.

<sup>4</sup> [Thomas] Huxley, 'Time and Life: Mr. Darwin's "Origin of Species"', *Macmillan's Magazine*, December 1859, pp. 142–48 (p. 148).

not appreciate the full significance of them. As noted in Chapter 1, he wrote to Darwin explaining that a motive for writing *Erewhon* was to expose the use of false analogy in argument.

However, as Butler recounts in *Unconscious Memory*, it was not until 1877 and 1878 that he acquainted himself with the work of the early evolutionists, Buffon, Erasmus Darwin, and Lamarck. He then came to believe that the suppression of this work and the promotion of neo-Darwinism, as he called it, by the new scientific elite was part of a strategy aimed at establishing a secular authority that would displace the authority of the Church of England. Butler repeatedly, both explicitly and implicitly, referred to men of science as the new priesthood, and saw them exercising the same tyranny over the public as had their predecessors. In *Life and Habit* he writes that the man of science ‘is but medicine-man, augur, priest, in its latest development’, and that ‘the tyranny of the Church is light in comparison with that which future generations may have to undergo at the hands of the doctrinaires’ (*LH*, pp. 35, 34).

Nevertheless, although he recognized that science and religion were in conflict, he did not believe that this should necessarily be the case. In *Luck, or Cunning?*, writing of ‘the supposed antagonism between religion and science’, he argues that

these two are not, or never ought to be, antagonistic [...]. When people talk about reconciling religion and science they do not mean what they say; they mean reconciling the statements made by one set of professional men with those made by another set whose interests lie in the opposite direction.<sup>5</sup>

Such a diagnosis anticipates late twentieth- and twenty-first-century revisionist accounts of the supposed war between science and religion.<sup>6</sup> Echoing Butler, Paul White has written that ‘the “conflict” of science and religion has been reinterpreted as a contest between professional groups for cultural authority’.<sup>7</sup> In his four evolutionary works published between 1878 and 1887 one can trace Butler’s apprehension of the emergence of this professional scientific elite, and how this developed into a vociferous distrust of it in general, and of Darwin in particular. This distrust was based upon the

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<sup>5</sup> *Shrewsbury Edition*, ed. by Jones and Bartholomew, VIII: *Luck, or Cunning?*, 193. Further references to this volume are given after quotations in the text and prefixed *LC*.

<sup>6</sup> The most important early text is James R. Moore, *The Post-Darwinian Controversies: A Study of the Protestant Struggle to Come to Terms with Darwin in Great Britain and America, 1870–1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979).

<sup>7</sup> White, p. 101. White refers the reader to Frank M. Turner, *Contesting Cultural Authority: Essays in Victorian Intellectual Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993) as another example of such a revisionist account.

disjunction between the professed disinterestedness of the men of science and the actual self-serving methods used to establish their cultural authority.

Following the exchanges in the New Zealand press in 1862–63, and in the articles that followed in 1863–65, Butler did not again discuss Darwin by name until the publication of *Life and Habit* in 1878.<sup>8</sup> This sets out his theory of inherited memory and its evolutionary consequences. As he would later confess in *Unconscious Memory*, he did not begin to question Darwin's theory until he had almost finished *Life and Habit*, when he was alerted to the objections raised by St George Mivart in his *On the Genesis of Species* (1871), 'the most devastating all-round attack on natural selection in Darwin's lifetime'.<sup>9</sup> *Life and Habit* closes with a brief comparison of the evolutionary theories of Lamarck and Darwin, coming down firmly in favour of the former, and a consideration of Mivart's 'unanswerable' objections to Darwin's theory (*LH*, p. 239). In a pointed gesture towards Darwin, who failed to consider the ideas of his predecessors until the third edition of the *Origin*, the bulk of *Evolution, Old and New*, Butler's second evolutionary work, is a historical sketch of evolutionary thought. Most space is devoted to a description of the theories of Buffon, Erasmus Darwin, and Lamarck, in which he contrasts these theories with those of Charles Darwin. His aim is to 'show why the *Origin of Species*, though an episode of incalculable value, cannot, any more than the *Vestiges of Creation*, take permanent rank in the literature of evolution' (*EON*, p. 54). In his third evolutionary work, *Unconscious Memory*, Butler begins with an outline of how he came to write *Life and Habit*, and *Evolution, Old and New*. As will be discussed below, these early chapters also detail Butler's version of his argument with Darwin over the English translation of Ernst Krause's biography of Erasmus Darwin. The bulk of the work, however, is taken up by a comparison of Ewald Hering's theory of inherited memory and Edward von Hartmann's work 'Philosophy of the Unconscious', with the view of appealing to the former's authority to validate his own work, and of distancing himself from the latter. The aim in his final evolutionary work, *Luck, or Cunning?*, was to discredit once and for all 'the mindless theory of Charles-Darwinian natural selection' (*LC*, p. xvii). One of the methods by which he attempts to achieve this is by a detailed examination of the changes Darwin made to the various editions of the *Origin*, which leads to the conclusion

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<sup>8</sup> Darwin is fleetingly mentioned once in *The Fair Haven*, together with Sir Isaac Newton and Adam Smith, whose methods of argument are all contrasted favourably with the disingenuousness of Dean Alford who tries to argue for the veracity of Christ's death from a consideration of John's account of the crucifixion (p. 152).

<sup>9</sup> Adrian Desmond and James Moore, *Darwin* (London: Penguin, 1992), p. 577.

that Darwin's work is internally contradictory; and, more seriously, that Darwin knew he was wrong to claim the theory proposed as his own.

The reader is alerted to Butler's change of view resulting from his reading of Mivart by the two epigraphs to *Life and Habit* which are taken from Lucian's *Icaromenippus*, and both of which are included in the original Greek and in Butler's paraphrase.<sup>10</sup> *Icaromenippus* was written in the form of a satirical dialogue, as were several of Butler's works, in which the cynic Menippus flies to the moon where he engages in colloquy with the gods, and in which the philosophers on earth are exposed as hypocrites and mocked for using abstruse and meaningless language. Northrop Frye has written that Lucian was a disciple of Menippus and that, since the works of Menippus have been lost, the genre of Menippean satire can be traced back from Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* (1932), through Butler's *Erewhon* and Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* (1726), all the way to Lucian. Butler's epigraphs, therefore, indicate the self-consciousness with which he placed himself within the tradition of satirizing institutionalized natural philosophy. Frye writes that the genre deals with the mental attitudes of

pedants, bigots, cranks, parvenus, virtuosi, enthusiasts, rapacious and incompetent professional men of all kinds [...]. A constant theme in the tradition is the ridicule of the *philosophus gloriosus*. Lucian ridicules the Greek philosophers, Rabelais and Erasmus the scholastics, Swift the Cartesians and the Royal Society, Voltaire the Liebnitzians, Peacock the Romantics, Samuel Butler the Darwinians, Huxley the behaviorists.<sup>11</sup>

The first epigraph is particularly cryptic: 'We are all terribly afraid of them.' It is taken from a speech by Jupiter to the assembled gods in which he has just described the philosophers as 'lazy, disputatious, vainglorious, quick-tempered, gluttonous, doltish, addle-pated, full of effrontery, and to use the language of Homer, "a useless load to the soil"'.<sup>12</sup> In the context of *Life and Habit*, however, 'we' and 'them' refer to laymen and professional scientists, respectively. This is corroborated by Butler's prominent statement on the opening page in which he confesses 'that my book cannot be intended for the perusal of scientific people; it is intended for the general public only, with whom I believe myself to be in harmony' (*LH*, pp. 1–2). He 'disclaim[s] for these pages the smallest pretension to scientific value, originality, or even to accuracy of more than a

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<sup>10</sup> It is interesting that Joel Relihan has translated the full title of *Icaromenippus* as 'Menippus the New Icarus, or Over the Rainbow'. The sub-title of *Erewhon* is 'Over the Range'. See 'Late Arrivals: Julian and Boethius', in *The Cambridge Companion to Roman Satire*, ed. by Kirk Freudenburg (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp. 109–22 (p. 110).

<sup>11</sup> Northrop Frye, 'The Four Forms of Prose Fiction', *Hudson Review*, 2 (1950), 582–95 (pp. 589–90).

<sup>12</sup> *Lucian*, trans. by A. M. Harmon, 8 vols (London: Heinemann, 1910), II, 317.



very rough and ready kind' (*LH*, p. 1). After his early championing of the opinions of men like Huxley, as detailed above, Butler is now firmly on the side of the common sense views of the layman. The clear distinction Butler perceives between the professional and the layman is reinforced in the second epigraph, which is taken from the passage in Lucian's satire in which the Moon is addressing Menippus, and urging him to warn Jupiter that the philosophers have been insulting her. Butler paraphrases this injunction as: "Lay it well, therefore, before Jupiter, that if he will not bring these men of science to their proper bearings, I can stay here no longer."

These epigraphs, together with the disclaimer on the first page, help set a very disorienting tone for *Life and Habit*. On the page opposite the epigraphs, Butler's previous two works are listed, and *Erewhon* is described as 'a work of satire and imagination'. The authority of what I believe to be Butler's most important work in setting out his evolutionary theory is thereby potentially undermined by a paratextual apparatus that in no way dissuades the reader from imputing a satirical authorial intent; an undermining reinforced by the initial disclaimer to any pretence of scientific value. Butler may be appropriating for himself the rhetoric of humility that was an important means by which scientific authority was established, as I discuss below. Or it may be a pre-emptive strike against his critics. There is an element of truth in both these readings of the disclaimer, but I prefer to read his choice of epigraphs as a clear indication of the shift in his perception of men of science in particular and of professionals in general. Whilst the 'Book of the Machines' was in part a playful satire exploring the limits of logical reasoning, from the last few chapters of *Life and Habit* onwards Butler's project in his evolutionary works was a more indignant uncovering of the duplicitous rhetoric and unethical practice of professional scientists employed to promote their self-interest.

In the next section, I show how this shift was accelerated by the insult Butler believed he had suffered following the publication of Ernst Krause's biography of Erasmus Darwin (1879). This work was prefaced by a long preliminary notice written by Charles Darwin, just after Butler's own extensive treatment of the elder Darwin in *Evolution, Old and New*. What had initially been a scientific disagreement with Darwin over competing mechanisms of evolution now became an *ad hominem* attack on Darwin's perceived respectability, the source of much of his scientific authority. Butler's close reading of the *Origin* allowed him to impugn this respectability by exposing what he believed to be Darwin's plagiaristic mining of the works of the early evolutionists. For

Butler, the insidious means by which Darwin sought to further his own self-interest was emblematic of professionals as a whole.

### **Plagiarism and the Butler–Darwin controversy**

Plagiarism is such a serious charge because originality is one of the most highly valued attributes within academic science. According to Robert Merton, the sociologist of science, the key role of the scientist is the advancement of knowledge, which is achieved by original discovery.<sup>13</sup> The fulfilment of this role leads to rewards and esteem. Merton quotes a passage from Darwin's autobiography, in which Darwin confesses that 'this pure love [of natural science] has [...] been much aided by the ambition to be esteemed by my fellow naturalists'.<sup>14</sup> Furthermore, the recognition of property rights in science differs from that in other institutions in that once the original discovery is made, 'it becomes part of the public domain of science'. This being the case, 'property rights in science become whittled down to just this one: the recognition by others of the scientist's distinctive part in having brought the result into being' (Merton, p. 640). According to Merton, the reward system that recognizes originality includes eponymy, membership of scientific institutions, and posthumous fame.<sup>15</sup> The issue of one's posthumous reputation was important for Butler, and the poor reputation of the early evolutionists was one he sought to elevate in his writings:

My indignation has been mainly roused [...] by the wrongs [Darwin] has inflicted on dead men [Buffon, Erasmus Darwin, and Lamarck], on whose behalf I now fight, as I trust that some one [...] may one day fight on mine. (UM, p. 56)

Merton goes on to point out that originality is not the only value recognized by the institution of science. Amongst others, he highlights humility as that which tempers the urge to assert one's priority in discovery, as well as to acknowledge the debt to one's predecessors. There is, therefore, a tension between these two values, for, as Merton

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<sup>13</sup> Robert K. Merton, 'Priorities in Scientific Discovery: A Chapter in the Sociology of Science', *American Sociological Review*, 22 (1957), 635–59 (p. 639). The debate regarding the significance of the attributes that Merton proposed is a lively one. For a more recent discussion see John Ziman, *Real Science: What it is, and What it Means* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 31–55.

<sup>14</sup> Merton, p. 640. The original quotation can be found in Charles Darwin, *Autobiographies*, p. 86.

<sup>15</sup> Merton, p. 642. Interestingly, the earliest instance I have found of the use of the eponymous term 'Darwinism' in the periodical press predates the publication of the *Origin*, and relates to the poetry of Erasmus Darwin in an article published in 1840 discussing Shelley. See 'The Poetical Works of P. B. Shelley', *British and Foreign Review*, January 1840, pp. 98–127 (p. 105). For a discussion of the evolution of the term 'Darwinism', as more commonly understood, see James Moore, 'Deconstructing Darwinism: The Politics of Evolution in the 1860s', *Journal of the History of Biology*, 24 (1991), 353–408.

argues, ‘to insist on one’s originality by claiming priority is not exactly humble and to dismiss one’s priority by ignoring it is not exactly to affirm the value of originality’ (p. 646). For Merton, it is Darwin’s ‘rare candour’ that distinguishes him as the paradigmatic example of the ambivalence towards priority, engendered by this tension (p. 647). Huxley, also, would characterize ‘Darwin’s candour as something actually “terrible”’ (cited in *UM*, p. 2). For David Hull, however, humility takes a less self-effacing hue: ‘the chief function of referring to one’s predecessors is not to do them homage but to gain their support and the support of others in the attempt to take their place.’<sup>16</sup> As will be shown, this reading accords better with Butler’s view that Darwin’s candour was deliberately constructed in his writings as part of his rhetorical strategy to persuade his readers of the originality of his theory.

The tension Merton identifies between the values of originality and humility is well illustrated by that part of Darwin’s correspondence which relates to his discovery that Alfred Russel Wallace was about to publish a very similar evolutionary theory to his own. In a letter to Charles Lyell, two years prior to this discovery, Darwin confesses that ‘I rather hate the idea of writing for priority, yet I certainly should be vexed if any one were to publish my doctrines before me’.<sup>17</sup> Here, Darwin is explicitly claiming ownership of his ‘doctrines’. And two years later, on the day he received from Wallace the manuscript that would form part of their joint paper presented at the Linnean Society in July 1858, he again writes to Lyell: ‘So all my originality, whatever it may amount to, will be smashed.’<sup>18</sup> He includes, as part of his contribution to the joint paper, a letter written to Asa Gray in 1857 in order to establish his priority over Wallace, as well as to show that he had not plagiarized him.<sup>19</sup> Later, in his autobiography, knowing that Wallace had ceded any claims of his own priority, and, moreover, had lost some of his authority amongst scientific naturalists due to his public stance supporting spiritualism, Darwin was able to disclaim his earlier yearnings for priority, safe in the knowledge that it had since been granted him: ‘I gained much by my delay in publishing from about 1839, when the theory was clearly conceived, to 1859; and I lost nothing by it, for I cared very little whether men attributed most originality to me or Wallace’

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<sup>16</sup> David L. Hull, *Science as a Process: An Evolutionary Account of the Social and Conceptual Development of Science* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), p. 351.

<sup>17</sup> 3 May [1856], *DCP* <<http://www.darwinproject.ac.uk/entry-1866>> [accessed 8 September 2012]. Cited in Merton, p. 648.

<sup>18</sup> 18 June 1858], *DCP* <<http://www.darwinproject.ac.uk/entry-2285>> [accessed 8 September 2012].

<sup>19</sup> 5 September [1857], *DCP* <<http://www.darwinproject.ac.uk/entry-2136>>; Letter to Charles Lyell, [25 June 1858], *DCP* <<http://www.darwinproject.ac.uk/entry-2294>> [both letters accessed 8 September 2012].

(*Autobiographies*, p. 75). As Merton points out, originality and priority are not strictly synonymous, since ‘belated independent rediscoveries of what was long since known may represent great originality on the part of the rediscoverer’ (p. 647). However, for Butler, in the case of Darwin and his predecessors, Darwin could be granted neither priority nor originality, since any ‘rediscovery’ was not independent. Rather, Darwin knew the work of his predecessors, hence Butler’s implicit charge of plagiarism.

It is noteworthy that nowhere in his writings does Butler use the term ‘plagiarist’ or any of its cognates in connection with Darwin.<sup>20</sup> Indeed, in the second edition of *Evolution, Old and New*, which included some reviews, he unequivocally denies levelling the charge of ‘conscious and wholesale plagiarism’ at Darwin (*EON*, p. 345). He does, however, discuss the idea of plagiarism in his notebooks, and in what appears to be a veiled deflation of Darwin’s worth he writes that ‘the more original a writer is, the more pleasure will he take in calling attention to the forgotten work of those who have gone before him’ (*NB*, p. 120). Robert Macfarlane has detected a shift, occurring around the year of publication of the *Origin*, in which literary creation moved from being explained in terms of generation, or ‘*creatio*’, to being effected by rearrangement of earlier material, or ‘*inventio*’. He associates the former with the brief moment of inspiration, and the latter with the work of the artisan.<sup>21</sup> As will be demonstrated, Huxley used this distinction between inspirational genius and physical work in an attempt to exclude non-practitioners, such as Butler, from participating in the production of scientific knowledge. But Butler too believed that literary creation, which included scientific works, proceeded by *inventio*. He legitimized theft in artistic creation, writing that ‘honesty consists not in never stealing but in knowing where to stop in stealing, and how to make good use of what one does steal [...]. A good stealer [...] is *ipso facto* a good inventor’ (*NB*, p. 120). His charge against Darwin was not that he stole ideas from his predecessors, but that he did so without acknowledgement.

The full details of the Butler–Darwin controversy have been discussed at length elsewhere.<sup>22</sup> However, it is necessary to outline the background in order to appreciate the implications of Butler’s accusations. Butler’s *Evolution, Old and New* was first

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<sup>20</sup> Although Butler never uses the term ‘plagiarist’, he does charge Darwin with passing off the theory of evolution as his own, without acknowledging his debt to his predecessors, Buffon, Erasmus Darwin, and Lamarck. I therefore use the term ‘plagiarism’ as shorthand for Butler’s charge.

<sup>21</sup> Robert Macfarlane, *Original Copy: Plagiarism and Originality in Nineteenth-Century Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 6.

<sup>22</sup> See, for instance, James G. Paradis, ‘The Butler–Darwin Biographical Controversy in the Victorian Periodical Press’, in *Science Serialized: Representations of the Sciences in Nineteenth-Century Periodicals*, ed. by Geoffrey Cantor and Sally Shuttleworth (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2004), pp. 307–29.

advertised in the *Examiner* on 22 February 1879 (*UM*, p. 38). The advertisement announced that the book would be ‘a comparison of the theories of Buffon, Dr. Erasmus Darwin, and Lamarck, with that of Mr. Charles Darwin. The work will contain copious extracts from the first-named authors.’<sup>23</sup> From this brief notice, and given the critical tone of the later chapters of *Life and Habit*, Butler conceded that the advertisement ‘would enable Mr. Darwin and his friends to form a pretty shrewd guess as to what I was likely to say’ (*UM*, p. 38). The book itself was published in May 1879. Meanwhile, in February 1879, Ernst Krause published an article on Erasmus Darwin in the German periodical *Kosmos* to which Butler referred on the title page and in the preface to *Unconscious Memory*. Darwin commissioned and financed an English translation of this article, to which he wrote a lengthy introduction, and which was published as a book in November 1879. Butler’s complaint was that Darwin, in his introduction, writes that the book is an accurate translation of Krause’s original article. This, he argues, is manifestly untrue, because the book cites passages, without acknowledgement, from *Evolution, Old and New*, and concludes with a crushing allusion to Butler’s work. Such an allusion would not have been possible if the book was indeed an accurate translation of the original Krause article as this was written before the publication of *Evolution, Old and New*. He politely wrote to Darwin outlining this, and asked for an explanation. Darwin rather weakly replied that it was such common practice to make alterations to the original prior to a translation ‘that it never occurred to me to state that the article had been modified’ (*UM*, p. 52). In a draft letter to the *Athenaeum*, which was never sent, Darwin wrote that in his introduction he had in fact noted that some changes had been made to the original article before translation, but that this note had been accidentally omitted in a subsequent revision.<sup>24</sup>

Following the receipt of Darwin’s letter, which is reproduced in full in *Unconscious Memory*, Butler felt ‘that it was time, in the interests of literary and scientific morality, even more than in my own, to appeal to public opinion’ (*UM*, p. 53). He did so in his letter to the *Athenaeum* on 31 January 1880. This letter prompted a further correspondence between Darwin, his son-in-law the barrister Richard Litchfield, Thomas Huxley, and Krause as how best to deal with the accusations. They concluded that no response would be offered, on the basis that a high-profile dispute with Darwin

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<sup>23</sup> ‘Stray Leaves’, *Examiner*, 22 February 1879, pp. 249–50 (p. 250).

<sup>24</sup> 24 January 1880, *DCP* <<http://www.darwinproject.ac.uk/entry-12439>> [accessed 8 September 2012].

in the periodical press was exactly what Butler desired.<sup>25</sup> This unwillingness by Darwin and his supporters to enter into controversy in the correspondence columns of the *Athenaeum* prompted Butler to continue his attack in his next work, *Unconscious Memory*.

The main substance of *Unconscious Memory*, Butler's third evolutionary work, as advertised prominently on the title page, is 'A Comparison Between the Theory of Dr. Ewald Hering, [...] and the "Philosophy of the Unconscious" of Dr. Edward von Hartmann'. Hering's theory of unconscious memory was similar to the theory of inherited memory that Butler had proposed in *Life and Habit*, and von Hartmann's *Philosophie des Unbewussten*, first published in 1869 had reached its sixth edition by 1874. Butler makes use of and acknowledges James Sully's review of this edition.<sup>26</sup> However, an important subsidiary aim of *Unconscious Memory*, as announced in the work's full title, was to bring to the attention of the public Darwin's edition of Krause's *Erasmus Darwin* and thereby publicly to charge Darwin with deliberately attempting to undermine Butler's scientific reputation. Leaving aside the unacknowledged references to *Evolution, Old and New* that were included within Krause's work, Butler was particularly angry about the conclusion, which he viewed as an underhand attack on his scientific credentials. Krause's book closes with the charge that any wish 'to revive [Erasmus Darwin's system] at the present day, as has actually been seriously attempted, shows a weakness of thought and a mental anachronism which no one can envy'.<sup>27</sup> As Butler had very recently sought to revive the work of Erasmus Darwin in *Evolution, Old and New*, he, not surprisingly, thought that this was a deliberate allusion to himself.

The preface to *Unconscious Memory* advertises the fact that Butler had deposited his annotated copies of the February 1879 issue of the German periodical *Kösmos*, which included the article by Krause on Erasmus Darwin, and of *Erasmus Darwin*, at the British Museum. His aim in doing so, it appears, was to make available to the general public the documents that he painstakingly analysed in order that his dispute with Darwin could be judged by it. Butler's attempt to claim the moral high ground is manifested in his dedication of the work to Richard Garnett of the British Museum, who had alerted him to one of the key passages evidencing Krause's unacknowledged use of Butler's own words from *Evolution, Old and New* (*UM*, p. 44). Given that one of the key charges Butler made was that Darwin did not fully acknowledge his debt to his predecessors, it was

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<sup>25</sup> Paradis, 'Butler–Darwin Biographical Controversy', pp. 323–24.

<sup>26</sup> [James Sully], 'The Philosophy of Pessimism', *Westminster Review*, January 1876, pp. 124–65.

<sup>27</sup> Ernst Krause, *Erasmus Darwin*, trans. by W. S. Dallas (London: Murray, 1879), p. 216.

imperative that Butler was absolutely scrupulous in acknowledging his own sources. One of Butler's complaints was that Darwin did not include his historical sketch of evolutionary thought prior to his work until the third edition of the *Origin* was published in 1861 (*LC*, p. 153).

In a letter to Baden Powell just after the publication of the *Origin*, Darwin explains why he had not initially included this historical sketch, asserts the originality of his own work, and also appears to answer criticism that he had not acknowledged Powell's own related ideas in his *Philosophy of Creation* (1855):

My health was so poor, whilst I wrote the Book, that I was unwilling to add in the least to my labour; therefore I attempted no history of the subject; nor do I think that I was bound to do so. I just alluded indeed to the *Vestiges* & I am now heartily sorry I did so. No educated person, not even the most ignorant, could suppose that I meant to arrogate to myself the origination of the doctrine that species had not been independently created. The only novelty in my work is the attempt to explain how species become modified, & to a certain extent how the theory of descent explains certain large classes of facts; & in these respects I received no assistance from my predecessors. To the best of my belief I have acknowledged with pleasure all the chief facts & generalisations which I have borrowed. If I have taken anything from you, I assure you it has been unconsciously; but I will reread your Essay. Had I alluded to those authors who have maintained, with more or less ability, that species have not been separately created, I should have felt myself bound to have given some account of all; namely, passing over the ancients, Buffon (?) Lamarck (by the way his erroneous views were curiously anticipated by my Grandfather), Geoffroy St. Hilaire & especially his son Isidore; Naudin; Keyserling; an American (name this minute forgotten); the *Vestiges of Creation*; I believe some Germans. Herbert Spencer; & yourself.<sup>28</sup>

When Darwin did add the seven-page historical sketch to the third edition of the *Origin*, Butler felt it to be 'meagre and slovenly' in acknowledging the work of his predecessors (*LC*, p. 179).

*Unconscious Memory* is, in part, both an appeal to the authority of Professor Hering for Butler's theory of inherited memory as set out in *Life and Habit*, and at the same time a detailed explanation of how he came to formulate this theory, the overt motive being to exonerate himself from that very charge of plagiarism with which he accuses Darwin. In the introduction he writes that 'the first, and far the most important, edition of the *Origin of Species* came out as a kind of literary Melchisedec, without father and without mother, in the works of other people' (*UM*, p. 8). In other words, it was created as the result of inspirational genius rather than by standing on the shoulders of its predecessors:

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<sup>28</sup> 18 January [1860], *DGP* <<http://www.darwinproject.ac.uk/entry-2654>> [accessed 8 September 2012].

*creatio* not *inventio*. Butler sets out a very detailed chronology, in some instances to the actual date, of when he wrote the chapters in *Life and Habit* that bear most closely on Hering's theory, and of when he read Hering. He maintains that he did not read Ray Lankester's translation of Hering's lecture until January 1878, which was after the publication of *Life and Habit* in December 1877. He wrote to the *Athenaeum* on 9 February 1878 explaining this, and thus pre-empting any possible charges of plagiarism (*UM*, p. 28). In this letter, Butler quotes extracts from Erasmus Darwin's *Zoonomia*, and Lankester's article on Hering's theory of memory, and notes the similarity with his own theory. He writes that 'had I known this I should have written simply as the supporter of my predecessors, and with less of that ambiguity of which your reviewer complains, not I am afraid, without justice'.<sup>29</sup>

Ironically, such an account of how he came to write *Life and Habit* suggests the same *ex nihilo* creation with which he charges Darwin. In so doing, Butler unwittingly highlights a tension at the heart of attempts to fashion an authoritative scientific persona. On the one hand, he implies that such a 'literary Melchisedec' as the first edition of the *Origin* is impossible, in the sense of *creatio* as defined by Macfarlane. All literary creations must evolve from earlier ones. On the other hand, if our ideas are merely the adaptation and rearrangement of those of our predecessors, Macfarlane's *inventio*, on what basis rest claims of scientific authority, if not on the notion of originality? Butler tries to have it both ways. He claims that he was unaware of Hering's previous work on memory when he wrote *Life and Habit*, but then attempts to validate his own authority by yoking his work to that of an acknowledged and earlier expert in the field. In effect, however, there is little difference between Butler's accounts of the genesis of his and Darwin's theories other than that he scrupulously and publicly acknowledged his hitherto unknown predecessors, and Darwin did not. In which case, morality is a crucial element of the foundation on which scientific authority is based; and it was Darwin's duplicitous rhetoric and unethical behaviour, rather than his science, which was the target of Butler's attack.

The unwillingness of Darwin and his supporters to enter into a public dispute with Butler in the correspondence columns of the *Athenaeum* led to the publication of Butler's version of events in *Unconscious Memory*. Huxley had recommended a similar tactic of non-engagement in John Tyndall's earlier dispute with James Forbes over

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<sup>29</sup> Letter to the editor, 'Life and Habit', *Athenaeum*, 9 February 1878, p. 189.



priority in establishing a theory of glacier movement, in which Tyndall had accused Forbes of plagiarizing the work of French glaciologist Bishop Rendu. In 1874, Forbes's Scottish supporters, Peter Guthrie Tait and William Thomson (later Lord Kelvin), had published 'a complete translation of Rendu's work, so that its merits and deficiencies could be judged publicly', just as Butler would publish *Unconscious Memory* six years later.<sup>30</sup>

Such examples of the unwillingness to enter into public dispute are what Ruth Barton has described as a 'tendency among Victorian scientific elites to avoid any unseemly controversy that might undermine the standing of science'.<sup>31</sup> This tendency may appear surprising given the frequency with which disputes were aired in the specialist or general press. Indeed, Barton notes that Norman Lockyer, the editor of *Nature*, which was 'the most authoritative of the popular science journals', and whose claim to authority was established by its impressive list of contributors, actively encouraged controversy within the journal's pages (pp. 225, 228). This willingness, together with the eminence of its contributors, meant that *Nature* was a site in which claims for scientific authority could be made and challenged.

However, as much as the scientific naturalists wished to disseminate their ideas to as broad an audience as possible, when it came to settling disputes, they appealed to a jury of men of science rather than to Butler's common men. Before his dispute with Tait and Thomson over the priority of the theory of glacier movement, Tyndall had encountered them when he attempted to appropriate the theory of the conservation of energy into the service of scientific naturalism in 1862.<sup>32</sup> This dispute had its roots in one that took place in the late 1840s between James Joule and Julius Mayer, a German physician, over priority of the theory of the mechanical equivalent of heat. Thomson and Tait sought to stake their claim before the large, non-scientific readership of *Good Words*, the latitudinarian Church of Scotland periodical, which had a circulation of 120,000 (Smith, p. 184). Just as Barton has shown how disputes over glacier motion were conducted in the correspondence columns of *Nature* in order to occupy the

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<sup>30</sup> J. S. Rowlinson, 'Tyndall's Work on Glaciology and Geology', in *John Tyndall: Essays on a Natural Philosopher*, ed. by W. H. Brock, N. D. McMillan, and R. C. Mollan (Dublin: Royal Dublin Society, 1981), pp. 113–28 (p. 125). For a full discussion of the Tyndall–Forbes controversy, see J. S. Rowlinson, 'The Theory of Glaciers', *Notes and Records of the Royal Society of London*, 26 (1971), 189–204.

<sup>31</sup> Ruth Barton, 'Scientific Authority and Scientific Controversy in *Nature*: North Britain against the X Club', in *Culture and Science in the Nineteenth-Century Media*, ed. by Louise Henson and others (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004), pp. 223–35 (p. 223).

<sup>32</sup> Crosbie Smith, *The Science of Energy: A Cultural History of Energy Physics in Victorian Britain* (London: Athlone Press, 1998), p. 171.

scientifically authoritative high ground, Tyndall shifted the debate from *Good Words* into the specialist scientific periodical, the *Philosophical Magazine* (Smith, p. 187). Of the readers of *Good Words*, Tyndall observed that ‘these respectable persons are placed in a false position when they are virtually called upon to decide between the rival claims of Joule and Mayer’ (cited in Smith, p. 187). For Tyndall, therefore, popularizer as he was, he nevertheless felt that only a ‘consensus of a legitimate (and legitimating) group of “instructed men of science”’ was fit to judge on scientific matters (Smith, pp. 187–88).

Nevertheless, *Nature* did manage to be popular as well as scientifically authoritative, and was established by Huxley and fellow members of the scientific establishment specifically to be so.<sup>33</sup> Together with its list of contributors, *Nature*’s authority was conferred by its publication of new scientific discoveries and experimental results.<sup>34</sup> Originality, therefore, one of Robert Merton’s norms, was a key criterion for any claims to authority. This criterion was also used to distinguish mere scientific popularizers from fully paid-up men of science: the latter pushed forward the boundaries of knowledge, whilst the former merely explained these advances to a lay audience.

The distinction between popular and scientifically authoritative was a difficult one to negotiate successfully. Tait attempted to undermine Tyndall’s authority by viewing his success as a popularizer as incompatible with professional recognition, writing that ‘Dr Tyndall has [...] martyred his scientific authority by deservedly winning distinction in the popular field’.<sup>35</sup> Ursula DeYoung has shown how Tyndall’s posthumous reputation suffered from the perception that he was more popularizer than bona fide pioneer.<sup>36</sup> However, there were other distinctions that served to preserve participation in scientific debate for a chosen few. In the next section I demonstrate how Butler’s critics sought to exclude him as an evolutionary speculator from intervening in debate. I show that Huxley subordinated the activity of thought to that of work in the production of scientific knowledge, and that Butler subverted this distinction in order to claim the right to intervene on behalf of the non-practitioner.

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<sup>33</sup> Adrian Desmond, *Huxley: From Devil’s Disciple to Evolution’s High Priest* (London: Penguin, 1998), p. 372.

<sup>34</sup> Peter C. Kjaergaard, “‘Within the Bounds of Science’: Redirecting Controversies to *Nature*”, in *Culture and Science in the Nineteenth-Century Media*, ed. by Louise Henson and others, pp. 211–21 (p. 212).

<sup>35</sup> Cited in Barton, in *Culture and Science in the Nineteenth-Century Media*, p. 232.

<sup>36</sup> Ursula DeYoung, *A Vision of Modern Science: John Tyndall and the Role of the Scientist in Victorian Culture* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), pp. 198–204.

## The role of the non-scientist in the production of scientific knowledge

In the introduction to *Luck, or Cunning?*, Butler identifies the two main criticisms aimed at him by his opponents. The first is that he is unqualified to write about science because his past career has been ‘purely literary’ (*LC*, p. 11). George Romanes’ scathing review of *Unconscious Memory* sought to disenfranchise ‘so incapable and ill-informed a man’ as Butler from offering any authoritative comment by deeming the particular field into which he had entered as one in which ‘he is no way adapted, either by mental stature or mental equipment’.<sup>37</sup> Romanes goes on to cast Butler as ‘an upstart ignoramus who, until two or three years ago, “considered” himself a “painter by profession”’ (p. 286). In contrast, James Ward, in his review of *Evolution, Old and New*, offered a qualified defence of Butler’s right to participate in scientific debate:

Men like Mr. Butler can do important services to scientific speculation. His rude irreverence for the *ipse dixit* of the man of science enables him to discuss scientific dogmas with a freedom and force impossible to the professional student of science. By his rough vigour he may even present scientific problems in a new light. At that point the amateur’s functions cease; the answers to his problems must be given by the profession.<sup>38</sup>

This review predates the Butler–Darwin dispute discussed above, but Ward’s assertions anticipate the opposing modes of operation of the disputants, and also point to the hardening into dogma of the pronouncements of the new elite of professionalized science. It is Butler’s ‘rude irreverence’ for the authority of Darwin that frees him from the constraints binding adherents of the institution of science, and allows him to voice objections that the profession would choose to remain unspoken. However, Ward also hints at the division of labour emerging as science became professionalized. Whilst amateurs such as Butler have a role to play in the formulation of speculative hypotheses, only those qualified to enter the profession and thereby implicitly to have access to the verificatory network of institutes such as the British Association, university-based science departments, laboratories, and specialist scientific journals possess the authority to stamp their imprimatur upon any elevation of speculative hypothesis to accepted knowledge.<sup>39</sup> A few years later, in his negative review of Romanes’ *Mental Evolution in*

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<sup>37</sup> George Romanes, ‘Unconscious Memory’, *Nature*, 27 January 1881, pp. 285–87 (p. 285).

<sup>38</sup> [James Ward], ‘Evolution, Old and New’, *Athenaeum*, 26 July 1879, pp. 115–17 (p. 117).

<sup>39</sup> For an account of how scientific facts are socially constructed, rather than merely verified, via networks including humans, animals, texts, and laboratory apparatus, see Bruno Latour, *Science in Action* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1987); and Bruno Latour and Steve Woolgar, *Laboratory Life: The Construction of Scientific Facts* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986).

*Animals* (1883), Ward again defended the role of the non-scientist in the process of the advancement of knowledge, pointing out that ‘scarcely professed biologists’ such as Grant Allen and Herbert Spencer have contributed in important ways to the development of Darwinism.<sup>40</sup> In his own defence, Butler argues that he has never claimed to be a man of science but has nevertheless devoted a long period of time considering the facts and arguments that have been collected by the scientists (*LC*, p. 12).

This leads on to the second criticism Butler claimed was made of himself, and is illustrative of the points made in Ward’s qualified defence quoted above. Butler’s critics argued that he had never conducted experiments and had never, therefore, collected facts for himself, but that he merely interpreted these facts second hand. This was also one of the main charges brought against Robert Chambers, the author of the *Vestiges*, and it had formed the basis of Huxley’s savage attack on George Lewes’s *Comte’s Philosophy of the Sciences* (1853).<sup>41</sup> Listing the errors of scientific fact Lewes has made, Huxley notes ‘how impossible it is for even so acute a thinker as Mr. Lewes to succeed in scientific speculations, without the discipline and knowledge which result from being a worker also’.<sup>42</sup> For Huxley, therefore, knowledge is created by working, rather than by merely thinking, and is therefore only available to those with privileged access to the laboratory, the site of scientific labour.

The distinction Huxley draws between thinking and working thus serves to erect a barrier around the institute of science that sought to exclude the non-practitioner. In this respect Huxley is emphasizing the importance of Michael Polanyi’s ‘tacit knowledge’ in the construction of scientific facts, in the sense of Thomas Kuhn’s definition of this as knowledge that ‘is learned by doing science rather than by acquiring rules for doing it’.<sup>43</sup> However, such a breach of the boundary around the institute of science was not impossible, especially outside of the ‘hard’ sciences such as physics and chemistry that required particularly sophisticated equipment for knowledge production. Sally Shuttleworth has written that subsequent to Huxley’s review, ‘Lewes set to work to prove his scientific credentials undertaking his own scientific research which led to the

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<sup>40</sup> [James Ward], ‘Mental Evolution in Animals’, *Athenaeum*, 1 March 1884, pp. 282–83 (p. 283).

<sup>41</sup> Richard Yeo, ‘Science and Intellectual Authority in Mid-Nineteenth-Century Britain: Robert Chambers and *Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation*’, *Victorian Studies*, 28 (1984), 5–31 (p. 5).

<sup>42</sup> [Thomas Huxley], ‘Science’, *Westminster Review*, January 1854, pp. 254–70 (p. 255).

<sup>43</sup> Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 3rd edn (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), p. 191.

publication of *Sea-Side Studies* (1858).<sup>44</sup> Furthermore, he sought to consolidate these credentials by presenting three papers at the British Association in 1859, which won praise from Huxley (Shuttleworth, 'Tickling Babies', p. 201). In contrast, Butler never attempted to establish any such scientific authority on the terms dictated by the establishment, that is, by experiment and subsequent reporting of any conclusions before a jury of men of science in order to be granted a positive verdict. Rather, instead of establishing facts first hand via observation and experiment, he argued that

no one need do more than go to the best sources for his facts, and tell his readers where he got them [...]. My complaint was that the facts which Mr. Darwin supplied would not bear the construction he tried to put upon them. (*LC*, p. 13)

Such a scrupulous attention to the acknowledgment of his sources was crucial to one whose main charge against Darwin was just that: 'To me it seems that the chief difference between myself and some of my opponents lies in this, that I take my facts from them with acknowledgment, and they take their theories from me — without' (*LC*, p. 13). One can go back to *Life and Habit* and show that Butler's view on this had been consistent over time. In that work, he wrote, without any apparent irony, that

I owe [Darwin] for almost all the facts which have led me to differ from him, and which I feel absolutely safe in taking for granted, if he has advanced them. Nevertheless, I believe that the conclusion arrived at [...] is a mistaken one [...]. I shall therefore venture to dispute it. (*LH*, p. 183)

Butler's utilization of the facts collected by men of science, including Darwin, is a prominent feature of his four evolutionary works. Once these facts had been published in the scientific literature, they thereby moved out of the private domain of the laboratory and became public property, and the layman, in Butler's view, was permitted to interpret them as he wished. Such 'communalism' was one of the norms Merton posited as distinguishing science from other institutions (Ziman, p. 33). For Butler, the interpretation by an elite scientific cadre had no priority over that of the layman, as long as the provenance of the facts was well established and reputable. In contrast, it was necessary for Huxley's project of professionalization that interpretation, too, be carried out within the walls of the scientific institution.

The view that the layman could offer scientific opinions that had a right to be taken as seriously as those of the man of science had become less common as scientific

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<sup>44</sup> Sally Shuttleworth, 'Tickling Babies: Gender, Authority, and "Baby Science"', in *Science in the Nineteenth-Century Periodical: Reading the Magazine of Nature*, ed. by Geoffrey Cantor and others, Cambridge Studies in Nineteenth-Century Literature and Culture, 45 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 199–215 (p. 201).

discoveries and specializations grew in the nineteenth century. In the preface to his *Philosophy of the Inductive Sciences* (1840) William Whewell acknowledged and addressed the complaint of professionals operating in the relatively new discipline of physiology, that amateurs are not qualified to offer opinions:

Those who have well studied [physiology], feel a persuasion, a very natural and just one, that nothing less than a life professionally devoted to the science, can entitle a person to decide the still controverted questions which it involves; and hence they look, with a reasonable jealousy, upon attempts to discuss such questions, made by a *lay* speculator.<sup>45</sup>

Much later, after the publication of the *Origin*, Whewell suggested that the science of biology had become too specialized to be discussed with authority by the general public. In a letter to James Forbes, he wrote of Bishop Wilberforce's debate with Huxley at the Oxford meeting of the British Association that it was 'not prudent to venture into a field where no eloquence can supersede the need of precise knowledge'.<sup>46</sup>

As discussed above, Butler sets out his views on the antagonism between professional scientists and the general public in the epigraphs to *Life and Habit*. In that work he argues that they both practise science, albeit of two different kinds, a distinction based upon his important idea of the primacy of unconscious knowledge over conscious ratiocination:

The one class is deeply versed in those sciences which have already become the common property of mankind [...]. These are the quiet peaceable people [...] who wish to live and let live, as their fathers before them. The other class is chiefly intent upon pushing forward the boundaries of science [...]; these last are called pioneers of science, and to them alone is the title 'scientific' commonly accorded [...]. Surely the class which knows thoroughly well what it knows, and which adjudicates upon the value of the discoveries made by the pioneers — surely this class has as good a right or better to be called scientific than the pioneers themselves. (*LH*, pp. 26–27)

'Common property of mankind' sounds remarkably like Bruno Latour's idea of the black box used in his loose sense of a well-established scientific fact that is no longer disputed (*Science in Action*, p. 131). For Butler, some ideas have proved so practically workable over long periods of time that there is no point questioning them, certainly not by the class 'deeply versed' in them. These people, unlike the professional scientific pioneers, 'have little inclination to extend the boundaries of human knowledge', and its exemplars are

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<sup>45</sup> Rev. William Whewell, *The Philosophy of the Inductive Sciences, Founded Upon Their History*, 2 vols (London: Parker, 1840), I, p. xii, emphasis in original.

<sup>46</sup> Letter to James Forbes (24 July 1860), cited in Richard Yeo, *Defining Science: William Whewell, Natural Knowledge, and Public Debate in Early Victorian Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 254.

the best class [...] of our English youth, who live much in the open air, and, as Lord Beaconsfield finely said, never read [...]. Unfortunately, the apparatus necessary for this kind of science is so costly as to be within the reach of few, involving, as it does, an experience in the use of it for some preceding generations. (*LH*, pp. 26, 29)

Here, via the use of the word ‘apparatus’, with all its connotations of a carefully policed laboratory, Butler is subverting an exclusionary terminology similar to that implied by Huxley’s distinction between thought and work. Here, also, in his exaltation of this class of ‘quiet, peaceable people’ who, ironically, ‘never read’, one can discern the ideal readers of all Butler’s works, whom he addresses on the opening page of *Life and Habit*. These are the readers to whom he repeatedly appeals as an authority higher than the professional men of science. Higher, because their knowledge and their ethics have been inherited and refined over centuries of good breeding. In contrast, the knowledge of the pioneer men of science is inchoate, precarious, and contingent.

Alfred Russel Wallace’s review of *Life and Habit* in *Nature* went some way to corroborate Butler’s view of the democratic nature of scientific knowledge production. However, Butler’s ‘wild and improbable’ theory of inherited memory is only granted such qualified assent due to its ‘considerable support from the views of Haeckel and other German physiologists of the most advanced school’.<sup>47</sup> Nevertheless, Wallace goes on to urge that such authoritative support ‘should induce us to give more careful consideration to the views of a writer who, although professedly ignorant of science, yet possesses “scientific imagination” and logical consistency to a degree rarely found among scientific men’ (p. 480). This accords with Ward’s later review of *Evolution, Old and New* discussed above.

Two inferences can be drawn from these reviews. First, that the ‘scientific imagination’, however defined, is not the sole property of the man of science, and that a layman such as Butler can also possess it. Second, they validate the use of the imagination in scientific enquiry, in addition to the work of careful observation and experimentation. Wallace comes close to conflating this creative faculty of the imagination with the usually pejorative ‘speculation’ when he concludes that ‘though we can at present only consider this work as a most ingenious and paradoxical speculation, it may yet afford a clue to some of the deepest mysteries of the organic world’ (p. 480). William Whewell, also, believed that ‘the mind was dynamic and creative: great

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<sup>47</sup> Alfred R. Wallace, ‘Organisation and Intelligence’, *Nature*, 27 March 1879, pp. 477–80 (p. 480).

discoveries were imaginative and speculative in their quest for knowledge of nature'.<sup>48</sup> William Carpenter had written that 'it cannot be questioned by any one who carefully considers the subject [...] that the *creative Imagination* is exercised in at least as high a degree in Science, as it is in Art or Poetry'.<sup>49</sup> And Herbert Spencer understood the role played by the imagination in scientific enquiry: 'Imagination is the power of mental representation [...]. So conceived, it is seen to distinguish not poets only, but men of science; for in them, too, "imagination bodies forth the forms [and actions] of things unknown."' <sup>50</sup> Just as analogical reasoning could be used to infer the unknown, so too could the creative faculty of the imagination. Both analogy and the imagination are tools used to push the boundary that separates the known from the unknown.

The attack by Romanes on Butler, implying as it did that it was Butler's artistic temperament *per se* that made him unfit for scientific inquiry, looks increasingly isolated when viewed in relation to contemporary understanding of the role of the scientific imagination. In contrast to Romanes' contemptuously dismissive view of Butler as a mere 'literary man', common qualities, and the common tools used, are identified here between the poet and the man of science; and, indeed, even Huxley does not discriminate against the artist amongst all non-practitioners of science. In fact, as White has demonstrated, Huxley was careful to 'appropriate aspects of literary identity, such as imagination, in [his] efforts to inscribe science within culture' (White, p. 95).

John Tyndall, one of the main proponents of scientific naturalism, also championed the imagination as an aid to scientific discovery. In his address delivered to the British Association at Liverpool in 1870, on the 'Scientific Use of the Imagination', he argued that 'with accurate experiment and observation to work upon, Imagination becomes the architect of physical theory'.<sup>51</sup> For Tyndall, then, scientific knowledge is a product of the work of the creative imagination upon the raw material provided empirically. The scientific imagination, one of Tyndall's tools for knowledge production was, therefore, available outside the leaky boundary separating professional science from the general public. To make this boundary more watertight would require Huxley's demotion of the role of thought in the production of knowledge. The concomitant Huxleyan apotheosis of the physical labour of experiment and observation was

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<sup>48</sup> Yeo, *Defining Science*, p. 13.

<sup>49</sup> William Carpenter, *Principles of Mental Physiology*, 6th edn (London: Kegan Paul, 1881), pp. 506–07, emphasis in original.

<sup>50</sup> Herbert Spencer, 'The Late Professor Tyndall', *Fortnightly Review*, February 1894, pp. 141–48 (p. 142).

<sup>51</sup> John Tyndall, *Fragments of Science*, 6th edn, 2 vols (London: Longmans, Green, 1879), II, 104.



consequent upon the requirement for a more securely policed boundary around the physical space of the scientific workplace. It was the undertaking of physical labour oneself that fitted one as qualified to comment on science. Butler, like Lewes before him, was unfit because he utilized the fruits of the labours of others as raw material for his speculations.

The work of social epistemologists, Edward Craig and Miranda Fricker, can help to illuminate Butler's position vis-à-vis his opponents. Following the work of Craig, Fricker has argued that humans have a basic need for truth which leads them to seek 'good informants', who are distinguished by competence, trustworthiness, and by what Craig has termed 'indicator-properties'.<sup>52</sup> In Fricker's reading these are those properties of an informant that 'signal the presence of both competence and trustworthiness' (Fricker, p. 163). Fricker goes on to define 'rational authority' as that possessed by an informant who is both competent and trustworthy; and indicator-properties allow the informant to be identified as such, that is, to be credible (pp. 166–67). She therefore distinguishes between credibility on the one hand, and rational authority on the other. It is possible to be competent and trustworthy but to lack credibility. Conversely, one can appear credible but actually be incompetent or untrustworthy. The appurtenances of respectability, for instance, may give the impression of competence and trustworthiness. It is within the gap between rational authority and credibility that resides what Fricker terms 'epistemic injustice' (p. 170).

Moreover, the idea of competence connotes the possession of a qualification, and therefore of passing some formal or informal test; whereas trustworthiness is a moral quality, and is hence bound up with the idea of respectability, and, in Butler's view, good breeding. Using such a framework, one can understand the relative positions of Butler and his opponents. For Huxley, competence in science was acquired by a formal education and training in experimentation and observation within a laboratory. Until the exchange of letters relating to Krause's biography of Erasmus Darwin, Butler was viewed merely as an incompetent commentator on science, because he lacked this training. However, following his public attack on Darwin in the *Athenaeum*, his moral qualities were also impugned. Huxley wrote to Darwin: 'I am astounded at Butler — who I thought was a gentleman though his last book [*Evolution, Old and New*] appeared to

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<sup>52</sup> Edward Craig, *Knowledge and the State of Nature: An Essay in Conceptual Synthesis* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), pp. 26–28; Miranda Fricker, 'Rational Authority and Social Power: Towards a Truly Social Epistemology', *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, n.s. 98 (1998), 159–77 (p. 162).

me to be supremely foolish.’<sup>53</sup> As White has demonstrated, the question of gentlemanliness inflected many of the nineteenth-century debates over scientific authority.<sup>54</sup> In the following section, I go on to demonstrate how, for Butler, Darwin moved from being a ‘good informant’ to becoming untrustworthy, as the terms of the debate shifted from a consideration of scientific competence to one of personal moral qualities.

In *Unconscious Memory*, Butler pointedly juxtaposed two epigraphs in order to highlight the epistemic injustice he felt he had suffered at the hands of Darwin and his supporters. The first is taken from a hostile review in the *Edinburgh Review* of Thomas Young’s Bakerian Lecture of 1801 at the Royal Institution in which Young put forward his wave theory of light in preference to the rival particle theory. It begins by asserting that Young’s paper ‘contains nothing which deserves the name either of experiment or discovery’, and ends with a ‘wish to raise our feeble voice against innovations, that can have no other effect than to check the progress of science, and renew all those wild phantoms of the imagination which Bacon and Newton put to flight from her temple’.<sup>55</sup> Such a view champions the work of the experimentalist at the expense of the mere imagination of the speculator. However, Butler’s second epigraph is taken from a lecture by Tyndall, in which Tyndall notes that Young’s theory was initially mocked because he was ahead of his time, although ‘in our days, it is the accepted theory, and is found to explain all the phenomena of light’.<sup>56</sup> The obvious subtext underlying these epigraphs is that the theory of unconscious memory, advanced first by Hering, and later by Butler in *Life and Habit*, although ridiculed by the scientific establishment, would one day be accepted. However, given its juxtaposition with the first epigraph which rails against the pernicious effect of the imagination on scientific progress, and given Tyndall’s public statements exalting the imagination, the second epigraph can also be seen to function as an implicit endorsement of Butler’s imaginative speculations by the very cadre of scientific naturalists who were most opposed to his views, and who most wanted to exclude non-scientists such as him from contributing to scientific debate.

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<sup>53</sup> 3 February, 1880, in *The Huxley File*

<<http://aleph0.clarku.edu/huxley/letters/80.html>> [accessed 8 September 2012].

<sup>54</sup> White, pp. 62–66. See also Gowan Dawson, *Darwin, Literature, and Victorian Respectability* for an account of the importance of Darwin’s apparent respectability to the reception of the *Origin*.

<sup>55</sup> Epigraph to *Unconscious Memory*, taken from ‘The Bakerian Lecture on the Theory of Light and Colours’, *Edinburgh Review*, January 1803, pp. 450–56 (pp. 450–51).

<sup>56</sup> Epigraph to *Unconscious Memory*, taken from ‘Professor Tyndall on Light’, *The Times*, 27 April 1880, p. 6.

The *Edinburgh Review* article, however, has wider significance for Butler's contestation of scientific authority, as it illuminates the debate over scientific method at the turn of the nineteenth century and illustrates the fallacy of the argument from authority, or, to adapt a phrase of James Ward in his review of *Evolution, Old and New* discussed above, the use of 'ipse-dixitism' as a wrongful means of establishing one's scientific credentials. The article begins by castigating the Royal Society as being 'forgetful of those improvements in science to which it owes its origin [...] [and] giving the countenance of its high authority to dangerous relaxations in the principles of physical logic' ('The Bakerian Lecture', pp. 450–51). It goes on to accuse Young of putting forward a baseless hypothesis:

An hypothesis which is assumed from a fanciful analogy, or adopted from its apparent capacity of explaining certain appearances, must always be varied as new facts occur, and must be kept alive by a repetition of the same process of touching and retouching, of successive accommodation and adaptation, to which it originally owed its puny and contemptible existence. But the making of an hypothesis is not the discovery of a truth [...]. A mere theory [...] is the unmanly and unfruitful pleasure of a boyish and prurient imagination, or the gratification of a corrupted and depraved appetite. (p. 452)

Such an account accords with Lorraine Daston's and Peter Galison's account of the perceived dangers in the Enlightenment posed by the imagination to legitimate and rational scientific inquiry. They write that 'reason might succumb to the blandishments of the imagination, that "coquette" who aimed primarily at pleasure, rather than at truth. Imagination could substitute fanciful but alluring systems for genuine impressions derived from memory and sensation.'<sup>57</sup> The *Edinburgh Review* article later accuses Young of using the authority of Newton's name as an erroneous endorsement for his hypotheses concerning the existence of the ether. Even if Newton did unequivocally provide such evidence, which was a moot point, there is nevertheless an authority even higher than Newton to which any theory must bow:

We hold the highest authority to be of no weight whatever in the court of Reason; and we view the attempt to shelter this puny theory under the sanction of great names, as a desperate effort in its defence, and a most unwarrantable appeal to popular prejudice. ('The Bakerian Lecture', p. 454)

Such an appeal to reason is almost identical to the appeal to the general public made by Butler in *Luck, or Cunning?* In this later work he rails against the 'academicism' as represented by professional scientists who were amongst Darwin's most powerful

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<sup>57</sup> Lorraine Daston and Peter Galison, *Objectivity* (New York: Zone Books, 2007), p. 224.

supporters. He writes that ‘there is a power before which even academicism must bow, and to this power I look not unhopefully for support’ (*LC*, p. 141).

However, this illustrates just how equivocal the appeal to the ‘common sense’ of the general public was for Butler, over seventy years after the publication of the *Edinburgh Review* article. On the one hand, he consistently opposed the man of science to the general public, and sought authority for his theories by an appeal to the common man. A spectacular example of this has already been noted: the depositing in the British Museum of his annotated copies of Krause’s article and biography of Erasmus Darwin. On the other hand, it illustrates the extent to which such an appeal could be muffled by the ‘popular prejudice’ in favour of Darwin engendered by the nascent nineteenth-century Darwin industry, as exemplified by pro-Darwin popularizers of science such as Grant Allen and Arabella Buckley, the former to whom Butler would devote a whole chapter of *Luck, or Cunning?* This industry was, according to Butler, partly responsible for the construction of the image of Darwin as the respectable, cautious, reliable, and modest man of science, whose name thereby added weight to his otherwise flimsy and contradictory theory. However, in addition to this, Butler also believed that Darwin skilfully fashioned for himself an image that would appeal both to the professional scientists and to the general public. For Butler, this was the obverse of the epistemic injustice of which he felt victim. In Fricker’s terms, Darwin’s apparent credibility masked his lack of rational authority. In the next section, I show how Butler conceived of Darwin’s self-fashioning, and how, in his later works, this led to his *ad hominem* attack, and the savage critique of Darwin’s allegedly unscrupulous rhetorical method.

### **Butler’s defacing of Darwin’s self-image**

Before the publication of *Luck, or Cunning?*, however, the only one of Butler’s four evolutionary works published after Darwin’s death, Butler observes in *Unconscious Memory* that Darwin has been primarily responsible for the popular acceptance of the theory of evolution. He asserts that ‘there is no living philosopher who has anything like Mr. Darwin’s popularity with Englishmen generally’, and also that ‘there are few men of scientific reputation who do not accept Mr. Darwin [...] as perhaps the most penetrative and profound philosopher of modern times’ (*UM*, pp. 1, 2). For Butler, therefore, Darwin, unlike Tyndall, had successfully negotiated the difficult task of appealing both to the common man and the man of science, albeit, as I go on to show,

via popularizers such as Grant Allen, who helped fashion for him a credible public persona.

In his autobiography, Darwin recounts receiving a letter telling him that the eminent geologist, Adam Sedgwick, believed that the geological work Darwin had carried out would enable him 'to take a place among the leading scientific men' (*Autobiographies*, p. 45). He goes on to relate how this letter spurred him on to greater activity:

All this shows how ambitious I was; but I think that I can say with truth that in after years, though I cared in the highest degree for the approbation of such men as Lyell and Hooker, who were my friends, I did not care much about the general public. I do not mean to say that a favourable review or a large sale of my books did not please me greatly; but the pleasure was a fleeting one, and I am sure that I have never turned one inch out of my course to gain fame. (p. 46)

Darwin is here making a distinction between commercial success, which necessarily implies a successful appeal to the general public, and the more intangible and honorific reward of recognition by fellow men of science. The pleasure of commercial success may indeed have been a 'fleeting one', but it is nevertheless noted specifically several times in his autobiography when he appraises his publications. He writes that the commercial success of his first work, his *Journal of Researches*, 'always tickles my vanity more than that of any of my other books' (p. 70). He goes on to enumerate the sales of the various editions of the *Origin*, and lists the various translations made of it, writing later that 'I have heard it said that the success of a work abroad is the best test of its enduring value' (p. 85).

One of the reasons Butler will later adduce for the general acceptance of the theory of evolution, and hence for Darwin's commercial success, is Darwin's deliberately crafted image of humility, one of the qualities highlighted by Merton as being valued by the institution of science. Such a valorization goes back at least to the commencement of the institutionalization of science. Steven Shapin and Simon Schaffer have argued that in the early days of the Royal Society, Robert Boyle portrayed himself as a modest man in order to reinforce his reputation for reliability, and hence his authority as an experimentalist via the written accounts of his experiments (Shapin and Schaffer, pp. 61–65). The most important means by which he asserted his modesty was by the use of hesitant and heavily qualified language, such as 'perhaps', 'probable', and 'seems' when discussing knowledge of physical causes rather than matters of fact (p. 67). Of Francis Darwin's edition of his father's *Life and Letters* (1887), Janet Browne has

written that ‘in his son’s portrait, Darwin’s fine, simple qualities were crucial factors in his intellectual success’, and that ‘Darwin’s personal humility was felt to have contributed materially to the process of convincing contemporaries about the validity of evolutionary views’.<sup>58</sup>

Butler argues that Darwin’s own reputation for honesty and humility was in part crafted by the rhetorical manner in which he addressed his readers:

He was so kind to us with his, ‘May we not believe?’ and his ‘Have we any right to infer that the Creator?’ etc. ‘Of course we have not,’ we exclaimed, almost with tears in our eyes — ‘not if you ask us in that way.’ (*LC*, p. 209)

It was via such manipulation of the emotions of his readers that Darwin was able to persuade them to believe his right to claim the theory of descent with modification for himself. Butler writes:

He knew our little ways, and humoured them [...]. He knew, for example, we should be pleased to hear that he had taken his boots off so as not to disturb his worms when watching them by night, so he told us of this, and we were delighted. (*LC*, p. 215)

Such a strategy was absolutely crucial for commercial success, for, as Butler asserted, ‘a book’s prosperity is like a jest’s — in the ear of him that hears it’ (*LC*, p. 216). However, for Butler, this deliberately crafted image of humility had the more important function of convincing Darwin’s readers that the theory of evolution was Darwin’s own. Butler pays particular attention to the very first paragraph of the *Origin*, and demonstrates that this set the tone for the whole work, as it ‘throws us off the scent of the earlier writers’ by implying that Darwin had reflected patiently over a long period of time on the observations made whilst on the *Beagle* voyage, and came to his conclusions apparently ignorant that his theory had been proposed by his grandfather (*UM*, p. 8). Such a picture, Butler argues, is inconsistent, ironically, with that given to us by Grant Allen, in his hagiographic biography in which Darwin, in his youth, is immersed in biological literature. Allen is quoted as writing, in particular, that the strong interest in evolution “‘was naturally communicated to a lad born of a scientific family and inheriting directly in blood and bone the biological tastes and tendencies of Erasmus Darwin’” (*LC*, p. 150).

The image Darwin portrays of himself in the introduction to the *Origin* is not an isolated one. Butler cites from a letter that Darwin wrote to Ernst Haeckel, and part of which was quoted in Haeckel’s *History of Creation* (1868; trans. 1876), in which Darwin

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<sup>58</sup> Janet Browne, ‘Making Darwin: Biography and the Changing Representations of Charles Darwin’, *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, 40 (2010), 347–73 (pp. 360, 361).

depicts himself, in Butler's view, as some sort of Romantic hero, 'a solitary thinker, a poor, lonely, friendless student of nature, who had never so much as heard of Buffon, Erasmus Darwin, or Lamarck' (*LC*, p. 149). Tyndall replicated such an image a few years later in his portrayal of the German physician, Julius Mayer. As discussed above, Mayer was championed by Tyndall in the latter's quest to wrest ownership of the theory of the conservation of energy from Thomson and Tait. Just as Butler accused Darwin of constructing for himself the image of a lonely naturalist, creating his theory out of nothing in ignorance of the work of his predecessors, so Tyndall was attempting to construct Mayer as 'a romantic man of genius, working alone, ignored by society, and capable of the most profound imaginative insights into the workings of nature ahead of those lesser mortals with the advantages of a lifetime devoted to the practice of physics'.<sup>59</sup> Crosbie Smith has noted that such an image was consistent with that painted by Tyndall's friend, Thomas Carlyle, in *Heroes and Hero Worship* (Crosbie Smith, p. 181).

However, Janet Browne has argued that around the time this particular Tyndall–Tait and Thomson controversy was at its height, such a conception of the Carlylean or Emersonian romantic hero, as embodied, for instance, by Humphry Davy, was making way for Samuel Smiles's alternative idea of success as a result of honest application. According to Browne, there was 'a shift away from the terminology of "genius" toward that of "exertion." Perspiration, not inspiration, became the rule of the day' ('Making Darwin', p. 361). Such a shift is consonant with Huxley's emphasis of work in the production of knowledge, and with the requirement that one must be a competent practitioner and experimentalist to be granted membership of the institute of science. Mere speculators, endowed only with the genius of their imagination would be excluded. As I discuss in Chapter 4, Butler's conception of genius straddles this shift. For him, genius and exertion were not opposed: genius arose as a result of Lamarckian effort. But the continuity of personal identity meant that the effort was undertaken by generations of one's ancestors, and genius was the fruit of this.

Notwithstanding this shift away from the romantic hero, Butler maintains that Darwin's self-portrayal as an isolated naturalist, living away from the metropolis at Down, was successful in establishing his reputation as the foremost man of science. But despite this reputation, Butler cannot help thinking that he is the victim of a latter-day

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<sup>59</sup> Smith, *Science of Energy*, p. 181.

Emperor's New Clothes trick. His reading of the *Origin* is very different from that prevailing in what he later terms 'academicism', and he writes that

I felt exactly the same when I read Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister*; I could not believe my eyes, which nevertheless told me that the dull diseased trash I was so toilsomely reading was a work which was commonly held to be one of the great literary masterpieces of the world. (*LC*, p. 141)

He associates 'academicism' with what we would today call the Darwin industry, and names some of its adherents as 'the Huxleys, Tyndalls, Miss Buckleys, Ray Lankesters, and Romaneses' (*LC*, p. 141). More generally, Butler also felt that Darwin was skilful in manipulating the press, especially the influential *Times* and *Athenaeum*, to support his case and claim to originality. As Butler, whose evolutionary works had been reviewed almost uniformly negatively, by this time knew, the support of these publications was crucial in shaping the views of their readers. Nevertheless, invoking once again his confidence in the views of the general public and its common sense, as against the logic and philosophy of the men of science, he asserts that it will be this higher power to which he will look for support (*LC*, p. 141).

Such an appeal to the public, however, could be double-edged, as his comment on *Wilhelm Meister* demonstrates. That Goethe's work was 'commonly held' to be great literature implies that this is the verdict passed by the general public, rather than by a narrow academy. Whilst Butler may wish his works to be judged by the public rather than by professional men of science, the success of the nineteenth-century Darwin industry in popularizing Darwin's ideas, together with favourable notices from influential publications, reinforces the point that, in his view, there existed a potentially malign influence on public opinion such that his ideal reader, the common man, was unable to offer an unbiased verdict on the competing claims of himself and his opponents. This was the environment created by the institute of science that allowed inferior ideas to survive and be inherited by future generations. In a similar fashion, he had earlier argued that erroneous interpretations of the Resurrection had survived, and he would argue later that generations of classical scholars had perpetuated the falsehood that the *Odyssey* was the work of Homer.

Butler increasingly sought to counter this influence by an *ad hominem* attack on Darwin in order to undermine his scientific authority, and to stall the propagation of his evolutionary theory. Such a strategy of conducting disputes had been proscribed as early as the establishment of the Royal Society, as Shapin and Schaffer have described (pp. 72–76). They write that



disputes should be about findings and not about persons. It was proper to take a hard view of reports that were inaccurate but most improper to attack the character of those that rendered them [...]. The *ad hominem* style must at all costs be avoided. (p. 73)

Nevertheless, beginning with *Unconscious Memory*, as has been demonstrated above, and particularly in the later *Luck, or Cunning*,<sup>2</sup> Butler attacked Darwin's character in order to attempt to dispossess him of the theory he believed he had wrongly claimed as his own.

Butler's most general charge, and one that was aimed at other men of science as well as Darwin, was that their language was obfuscatory, and their rhetoric similar to that used by theologians. Both used unclear prose in order to hide the flimsy nature of their arguments, and thus to promote their self-interest. He urges his readers not to 'be too much cast down by the bad language with which professional scientists obscure the issue, nor by their seeming to make it their business to fog us under the pretext of removing our difficulties' (*UM*, p. 198). He quotes from Alfred Russel Wallace's paper to the Linnean Society in 1858 in which Wallace stated that 'the hypothesis of Lamarck [...] has been repeatedly and easily refuted by all writers on the subject of varieties and species', and complains that 'it is the manner of theologians to say that such and such an objection "has been refuted over and over again," without at the same time telling us when and where' (*UM*, pp. 201, 202). It was as a result of Darwin's obfuscation that Butler would repeatedly and unflatteringly equate him with Gladstone: 'Mr. Darwin was the Gladstone of biology, and so old a scientific hand was not going to make things unnecessarily clear unless it suited his convenience' (*LC*, p. 73). He compares his sharp practice in the *Origin* to Gladstone's behaviour over the Irish land bill, a topical issue at the time of writing *Luck, or Cunning*,<sup>2</sup> in 1886.<sup>60</sup>

Obfuscation, therefore, was a charge that Butler levelled at theologians, politicians, and men of science in general, rather than at Darwin specifically, and was a rhetorical and textual symptom of the unethical professional mind seeking to promote its own interest. One of the most persistent charges Butler makes against Darwin in particular is that he subtly changes his opinions over the various editions of the *Origin*, without alerting the reader's attention, such that only the most attentive reader is aware of what has been done. In *Unconscious Memory* he writes that 'no one can understand Mr. Darwin who does not collate the different editions of the *Origin of Species* with some

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<sup>60</sup> *LC*, p. 136. Gladstone had allegedly kept his Liberal Party colleagues in the dark during the drafting of the 1886 Home Rule Bill. See Alvin Jackson, *Home Rule: An Irish History 1800–2000* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), pp. 56–57.

attention' (*UM*, p. 34). The ensuing inconsistencies in Darwin's theory would become a key target in *Luck, or Cunning?* In *Unconscious Memory*, however, Darwin's silent emendations impinge on his moral character, rather than on the overall coherence of his theory. What particularly angers Butler is that Darwin's attack on the then unknown author of the *Vestiges* in the first edition of the *Origin* is silently removed in later editions without any explanation, which amounts to a tacit acknowledgement of Darwin's misrepresentation of the views set out in the *Vestiges*. Butler asserts that 'a writer with any claim to our consideration will never fall into serious error about another writer without hastening to make a public apology as soon as he becomes aware of what he has done' (*UM*, p. 37). Within Butler's moral universe, there are universal standards of gentlemanly conduct and decency to which men of science are also bound in carrying out their professional affairs. That they feel able to operate by a more lax moral code is, for Butler, a measure of the gap between them and the common man of good breeding.

However, Darwin's silent emendations over the six editions of the *Origin* form the basis of a more extended attack, and potentially a more serious one, as they lay behind Butler's implied charge of plagiarism: more serious because originality was a crucial attribute in establishing the authority and reputation of the scientist. Butler asserts that Darwin knew that his claim to having originated the theory of descent with modification was a false one, and that in later editions of the *Origin* he silently emended the text in order to downplay, but not totally abandon, this claim. The supposed guilt that Darwin felt due to this false claim is manifested, according to Butler, in his progressive deletion of most occurrences of the phrase 'my theory', to which he devotes two chapters of *Luck, or Cunning*.<sup>61</sup> He ascribes the 'general massacre of Mr. Darwin's "my's" which occurred in 1869 and 1872', that is, in the fifth and sixth editions, to the publication of Haeckel's *History of Creation* in 1868, in which Haeckel devoted a substantial part to the theories of the earlier evolutionists (*LC*, p. 155). In Butler's view, such a publication would have made Darwin's claim to having originated the theory of descent with modification untenable. He also notes that Sir Charles Lyell, in the new 1872 edition of his *Principles of Geology*, would show "in justice to Lamarck", how the earlier evolutionists anticipated much that their successors wrote (*LC*, p. 178).

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<sup>61</sup> Butler identifies forty-five instances of the phrase 'my theory' in the first edition of the *Origin* (*LC*, p. 177). However, using the word search function on the various editions of the *Origin* at <darwin-online.org.uk>, I have found fifty-seven instances in the first two editions, fifty-six in the third and fourth, seventeen in the fifth, and fourteen in the sixth.

Despite the many emendations Darwin made over the various editions, the final paragraph of the *Origin* was left almost unchanged, and Butler urges that he must have been aware of the incongruence between the tenor of the book's argument and the conclusion. The reason for this deliberate deception, according to Butler is that although '[Darwin] disliked the accumulation of accidental variations, he disliked not claiming the theory of descent with variation still more; and if he was to claim this, accidental his variations had to be' (*LC*, p. 143). In other words, in order to claim the theory of descent with modification as his own, Darwin had to distinguish his theory from that of his predecessors. He did this by claiming to champion, on the title page, and in the body of the work, an alternative to their theory that variations arose purposively, that is, that they were fortuitous. He was, however, uncomfortable with this theory, hence the last paragraph of the *Origin* fails to mention that variations arise mainly by luck, and instead reverts to purposive causes, including Lamarckian use and disuse.

Butler's own clever use of epigraphs and other prefatory material has already been noted. However, in *Luck, or Cunning?* he presents us with an extended Genettean analysis of Darwin's paratextual strategy and shows how, beginning with the title page of the *Origin*, the reader was deliberately misled into ascribing the origination of the idea of descent with modification to Darwin himself. Furthermore, he asserts that the short title, 'On the Origin of Species', does not fulfil 'the object of a title, which is, of course, to give, as far as may be, the essence of a book in a nutshell' (*LC*, pp. 65–66). In this manner, Butler accuses Darwin of deliberately concealing from his readers his truly original theory, which was natural selection, acting on variations produced by luck, rather than by the volition of the organism itself. Whereas the short title appears prominently three times in large type, the full title 'On the origin of species by means of natural selection, or the preservation of favoured races in the struggle for life' appears only once, and, moreover, only in a small type face. Butler notes that in his paper to the Linnean Society, given in 1858, Darwin actually refers to his forthcoming book as 'Natural Selection', and believes that this would have more truly described its contents (*LC*, p. 65). He confesses that when he first read the *Origin*, he understood that 'natural selection' and the 'theory of descent with modification' were synonymous (*UM*, p. 4). Butler's implication is that Darwin changed the title in order to make his work more palatable to his readers, as well as to claim that he originated the theory of descent with modification.

Butler goes on to contrast the explicit message given in the conclusion of the book with the implicit message of the title page: ‘The last paragraph of the *Origin of Species* [...] is purely Lamarckian and Erasmus-Darwinian’ (*LC*, p. 134). In particular, he draws attention to one of the laws Darwin posits as being responsible for producing the many ‘elaborately constructed forms’, namely, ‘variability from the indirect and direct action of the external conditions of life and from use and disuse’ (cited in *LC*, p. 134). There are, therefore, two types of variation from which nature can select: those produced by luck, as implied by the phrase ‘favoured races’ in the extended title on the title page of the work; and what he terms ‘functional’ variations, that is, purposive variations produced by the volition of the organism itself. He asks, not without reason, why Darwin has chosen to emphasize variations arising from Lamarckian use and disuse in the conclusion, rather than arising by luck: ‘if they are not found important enough to demand mention in this peroration [...] in which special prominence should be given to the special feature of the work, where ought they to be made important?’ (*LC*, pp. 134–35). Butler adduces this as evidence of Darwin’s duplicitous rhetorical strategy. Whereas the title page and the body of the work gave the impression that the variations from which nature selects are due mainly to luck, the impression we are left with is that they are due largely to cunning: ‘the book preached luck, the peroration cunning’ (*LC*, p. 136). If Butler’s assertion is valid, he argues, again, not without reason, such deception must have been deliberate on Darwin’s part, given his meticulous attention to textual changes throughout the various editions. He goes on to examine how Darwin, together with his supporters and through Grant Allen’s posthumous hagiography, sought to fashion for himself the image of a reliable narrator, via the rhetorical strategy employed in the *Origin*. Such an image both diverted the reader’s attention away from his duplicity, and authenticated Darwin’s claim to authorship of the theory of descent with modification, albeit one which became more attenuated over time. Butler’s conclusion is damning:

I have no doubt that many a time between 1859 and 1882, the year of his death, Mr. Darwin bitterly regretted his initial error [of claiming the theory for himself, and not acknowledging his predecessors], and would have been only too thankful to repair it, but he could only put the difference between himself and the early evolutionists clearly before his readers at the cost of seeing his own system come tumbling down like a pack of cards; this was more than he could stand, so he buried his face, ostrich-like, in the sand. I know no more pitiable figure in either literature or science. (*LC*, p. 183)

Although Butler's very first response to the *Origin* was positive, and his attitude to Darwin one of respect, one can nevertheless detect in it and the ensuing correspondence the genesis of his later attack on the 'unscrupulous, self-seeking clique' of which Darwin was foremost (*NB*, p. 376). In particular, from this early stage, he established a distinct dichotomy between the expert man of science and the layman, and, more generally, the professional and the layman. Whilst he initially deferred to the expert, this authority was later deemed tyrannical, and was vigorously contested. The dichotomy was constituted, in part, by another between competing notions of epistemological agency. For Huxley, a practical scientific training in experimentation was essential for anyone with pretensions to be an authoritative creator of valid scientific knowledge. For Butler, on the other hand, the data created by experiment and observation were merely the raw materials that his scientific imagination could transform into a robust and defensible theory. The problem for the professional scientists was that in order to establish their authority and win esteem, they had to publish, but by so doing they gave access to experimental data to laymen like Butler who could interpret it as they wished. As long as this data was derived from a reliable source, and Butler sedulously took his from Darwin in the main, and as long as one did not resort to imperfect reasoning, such as the use of false analogies, as he had consciously done in *Erewhon*, he asserted the right of a layman to speculate on scientific matters. If, however, one is to rely on a third party to supply the data as raw material, this raises the important issue of how one is to rely on the competence and trustworthiness of your source. I have touched upon Fricker's concept of the 'good informant' in this chapter, and in the following I examine Butler's challenge to the authority of the written word of the Bible. In particular, I discuss the epistemological idea of the 'good informant', or, in literary terms, the reliable narrator, in relation to the testimonial evidence of the Gospel accounts of the Crucifixion and the Resurrection.

## Chapter 3

### The Evolution of Butler's Epistemology

The interpretation of the events surrounding the Resurrection and the Crucifixion interested Butler throughout his life. On his return to England in 1865, he published the rationalistic and anonymous pamphlet, *The Evidence for the Resurrection of Jesus Christ as Given by the Four Evangelists Critically Examined*. The title gestures towards David Strauss's *The Life of Jesus Christ Critically Examined* (1835), translated into English by the then Mary Ann Evans in 1846. The pamphlet drew little or no response, and in 1873 it was incorporated, almost in its entirety, within his pseudonymous and satirical reconversion narrative *The Fair Haven*. The events surrounding the Resurrection form a key part of Ernest Pontifex's loss of faith in *The Way of All Flesh* (1903), and the Ascension was satirized in *Erewhon Revisited* (1901). A sceptical view of the supernatural elements of Christianity was also central to Butler's important but neglected polypseudonymous series of letters, 'A Clergyman's Doubts', published in the *Examiner* in 1879. For him, the interpretation of these events in Christ's life was paradigmatic of the methods used by a professional body — the clergy — to systematically promote their own self-interest and project their authority whilst attempting to conceal from the public legitimate objections to this orthodoxy. Butler's various iterations of this exploration map the trajectory of his own evolving epistemology. This in turn intersects with and disturbs competing narratives of late nineteenth-century epistemology such as Lorraine Daston's and Peter Galison's shift from 'truth-to-nature' to objectivity and Christopher Herbert's account of Victorian relativity.<sup>1</sup> In addition, the close relationship Butler perceives between the mode of authorship and the projection of authority is testified by his use of a variety of authorial personas in treating similar content.

Coming in the wake of *Essays and Reviews* (1860), and Bishop Colenso's writings on the Pentateuch, Butler's *Evidence* was written at a time saturated with accounts attempting to place Christianity on a more rationalistic foundation. Its publication almost coincided with that of John Seeley's anonymous *Ecce Homo* (1866). Although preceded by Strauss's *Life of Christ* and Ernest Renan's *La Vie de Jésus* (1863), *Ecce Homo* was the first life of Christ by an English author.<sup>2</sup> It was 'an attempt to reconcile sceptics

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<sup>1</sup> Daston and Galison, *Objectivity*; Herbert, *Victorian Relativity*.

<sup>2</sup> Owen Chadwick, *The Victorian Church*, 2 vols (London: SCM Press, 1972), II, 62.

and positivists to Christianity, and to reconcile Christianity with the spirit of positivism'.<sup>3</sup> In his introduction to the third edition of *The Fair Haven* (1913), R. A. Streatfeild notes how fashionable theological polemics were in the early 1870s, and how *Ecce Homo* and Matthew Arnold's *Literature and Dogma* (1873) 'were eagerly devoured by readers of all classes' (*FH*, p. xiv).

Seeley's method was to imagine himself observing and tracing Christ's life in order to 'accept those conclusions about him, not which church doctors or even apostles have sealed with their authority, but which the facts themselves, critically weighed, appear to warrant'.<sup>4</sup> Butler also rejected traditional authority, and in the *Evidence* pamphlet he sought to 'critically weigh' the events of the Resurrection as described in the various Gospel accounts. Gladstone had praised Seeley's work, but Butler disliked it, despite the similar methodology.<sup>5</sup> Writing in 1885 of a dinner he had attended before writing *The Fair Haven*, he notes that 'there was a man named Seeley there, who had written *Ecce Homo*' which he describes as 'trash' (*Memoir*, I, 182). Whether or not he had Seeley in mind when writing *The Fair Haven*, Butler does satirize the attempt to reconcile rationalism with Christianity. As I go on to suggest, he also implies that both Christianity and positivism are inadequate in offering a comprehensive guide to life.

*Literature and Dogma* was first published in 1873 and outsold all Arnold's other works during his lifetime.<sup>6</sup> Stefan Collini explains how Arnold sought to apply the techniques of literary criticism to the interpretation of the Bible, in order to rescue Christianity from the literalism of orthodox theology that he believed had become untenable as a defence against recent advances in science and historical scholarship (Collini, p. 98). *The Fair Haven* also opens with the observation that the mother of its two purported authors was 'trained in the lowest school of Evangelical literalism' (*FH*, p. 3). In his preface to the Popular edition (1883), Arnold writes that 'by the sanction of miracles Christianity can no longer stand; it can stand only by its natural truth'.<sup>7</sup> Christ is held up as an '*absolute*': 'the perfection of an ideal' (p. x). The 'fundamental truth', therefore, of Christianity is not 'the miracle of the Incarnation', but the 'imitation of Christ'. Arnold closes his preface in a forthright manner: 'Our popular religion at

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<sup>3</sup> Murray Forsyth, Review of Deborah Wormell, *Sir John Seeley and the Uses of History*, *Historical Journal*, 25 (1982), 521–23 (p. 522).

<sup>4</sup> [John Seeley], *Ecce Homo: A Survey of the Life and Work of Jesus Christ* (London: Macmillan, 1866), p. v.

<sup>5</sup> W. E. Gladstone, 'Ecce Homo', *Good Words*, January 1868, pp. 33–39; February 1868, pp. 80–88; March 1868, pp. 177–85.

<sup>6</sup> Stefan Collini, *Matthew Arnold: A Critical Portrait* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2008), p. 95.

<sup>7</sup> Matthew Arnold, *Literature and Dogma: An Essay Towards a Better Apprehension of the Bible*, Popular edn (London: Smith, Elder, 1883), p. viii.

present conceives the birth, ministry, and death of Christ as [...] brimful of miracle; — *and miracles do not happen*' (p. xii). I go on to show that the unequivocal rejection of miracles by Butler was one of the two premises that led him to the conclusion that Christ never died as a result of his Crucifixion.

The pseudonymous pamphlet *Jesus versus Christianity*, published in 1873, reviewed both *Literature and Dogma* and *The Fair Haven*, as well as several other similar works, which all 'advocat[e] the displacement of the *régime* of dogma and belief by the substitution of one involving character and conduct'.<sup>8</sup> The writer asserts that there has recently been a 'rapid multiplication of writings designed to point the contrast between the character [...] of Jesus, and the religion which bears his name' (Cantab., p. 3). *Literature and Dogma* is read 'as clinching the blow struck at the whole fabric of dogmatic theology, and crowning the effort to restore the intuitions as the sole court of appeal' (Cantab., p. 22). The phrasing is interesting since the judicial metaphor was one employed repeatedly in Butler's writings, as was his privileging of intuition (or instinct) as the highest of our mental faculties, on account of it being synonymous with inherited memory (*LH*, chapter 11).

These rationalistic lives of Christ, together with Arnold's *Literature and Dogma*, may seem to support the familiar narrative that German biblical criticism, Darwin's theory of natural selection, and a critical approach to history had all helped to precipitate a mid-Victorian crisis of faith. This view has been challenged recently by Timothy Larsen, who argues that as a motif, this crisis of faith has been 'vastly overblown'.<sup>9</sup> Several decades before Larsen, Walter Houghton also argued that 'although the critical spirit was characteristic of the [Victorian] age [...], to a large extent the will to believe overrode the desire to question'.<sup>10</sup> Larsen traces the move from unbelief to faith through his study of seven prominent secularists who reconverted, and proposes instead the counter-narrative of a crisis of doubt. Although it would be going too far to suggest that Butler, too, could be considered a fully paid-up reconvert, I argue that the trajectory of his religious beliefs conforms to an extent with those traced by Larsen, and that his life, as well as those of his fictional alter egos, can be viewed

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<sup>8</sup> A Cantab., *Jesus versus Christianity* (London: Scott, 1873), p. 3.

<sup>9</sup> Timothy Larsen, *Crisis of Doubt: Honest Faith in Nineteenth-Century England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), p. 1.

<sup>10</sup> Walter E. Houghton, *The Victorian Frame of Mind 1830–1870* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1957), p. 94.



productively as a reconversion narrative in which reason is displaced by a reformulated version of faith as the ultimate basis of knowledge.

In this chapter, therefore, I trace the course of this narrative from the early pamphlet on the *Evidence for the Resurrection* to *Erewhon Revisited*, published a year before Butler's death. I demonstrate how his early rejection of a faith in the literal meaning of biblical authority was followed by a no less emphatic rejection of pure reason as a pathway to truth and knowledge. His peculiar narrative method, in which he adopts a variety of authorial identities, is I argue, absolutely integral to his belief that the discovery of truth, albeit a provisional one, is only to be found via the dialogic examination of an issue from all points of view. This narrative method allows Butler to navigate a middle way between Evangelical literalism and High Church or Catholic dogmatism to his own fair haven within the latitudinarian Broad Church. In several of his works, as already noted, he utilizes the metaphor of the court of law, in which he opposes the impartial judge with the paid advocate, or 'special pleader'. Butler often uses this distinction in order to demonstrate the vice of self-deception, a lack of candour, which is a concept crucial to an understanding of his thought. He believed that this vice was endemic within the professions, especially within the Church and the emerging scientific establishment. Whilst the members of these professions purported to be acting as impartial judges in their search for religious or scientific truth, they were in fact deceiving themselves, conducting a pseudo-inquiry, and acting instead like special pleaders to further their own self-interest. In the preceding chapter, I showed how Butler's close reading of the *Origin* led him to the conclusion that Darwin lacked candour. In this chapter, I discuss a similar charge he makes against Henry Alford, Dean of Canterbury, and one of the most popular biblical critics of his time. In the final section I argue that Butler's condemnation of self-deception contributed to his disavowal of agnosticism as a valid, and moral, epistemological stance.

### **Butler's early Unitarian sympathies and rationalism**

As outlined in Chapter 1, Butler abandoned his training for the ministry when he realized he could not subscribe to article XV of the Thirty-Nine Articles after discovering the inefficacy of infant baptism, and that this discovery was shared with Unitarians such as James Martineau. The Unitarian minister, Lant Carpenter (1780–1840), father of biologist William Carpenter, 'used the language of *Examine for yourselves*

instead of the language *Believe as I do*' (Chadwick, I, 392, emphasis in original). Given Butler's own preference for independent enquiry, it is not surprising, therefore, that he should express some sympathy with Unitarianism, a creed that had been adopted by his mother's family.

In a letter to his Unitarian cousin, Philip Worsley, written whilst he was in New Zealand in 1861, Butler asserts that:

I do not believe that there is a particle of important difference between your creed and mine; I utterly refuse to enter into minute disquisitions concerning the nature of the Trinity, and [...] will not hesitate to avow my belief that [the Athanasian Creed] deserves no more attention than if it were ['the composition of a drunken man'].<sup>11</sup> True, I believe Jesus Christ to have been the Son of God as much now as ever; but exactly how or exactly in what degree I don't care to enquire, for I feel that the enquiry only leads me into paths which human intelligence cannot tread — that is if I follow the enquiry as I should investigate a scientific subject, and do not content myself with a blind refuge behind formulae and cant phrases of whose meaning, if meaning they really have, I am entirely ignorant.<sup>12</sup>

His rejection of 'blind refuge' and cant would be elevated later into the charge of self-deception that he levelled at the professional classes. In the same letter, he describes the change of his religious views 'from my old narrow bigoted tenets to my far happier present latitudinarianism' (*Memoir*, I, 97). Writing to a college friend, William Thackeray Marriott, in the same year, he confesses that 'I think I am a Unitarian now'.<sup>13</sup> In another long letter of 1861 to his aunt, Philip Worsley's mother, Butler outlines the change in his religious views since he left England:

In the total wreck of my own past orthodoxy I fear I may be as much too sceptical as then too orthodox. [...]. I wonder more and more at the blind deference that is usually paid to the letter of Scripture. The total change that my opinions have undergone during the last two years has made me very cautious in believing myself to be right now [...]. I feel equally brotherhood with every man's creed, provided he holds it honestly and sincerely.<sup>14</sup>

A shift away from the 'blind deference' of faith to reason is entirely compatible with his perceived Unitarian sympathies, a creed that, after all, had evolved out of Enlightenment rationalism. It is compatible too with the critical reasoning employed in the *Evidence for the Resurrection*.

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<sup>11</sup> The title of his early article on evolution, 'Lucubratio Ebria', discussed in Chapter 1, translates roughly as 'the composition of a drunken man'.

<sup>12</sup> Cited in Jones, *Memoir*, I, 96–97 (10 January 1861). Amongst other doctrines, the Athanasian Creed describes the unity in one Godhead of the three persons of the Trinity: the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.

<sup>13</sup> Cited in Jones, *Memoir*, I, 97 (8 August 1861).

<sup>14</sup> *Family Letters*, ed. by Silver, pp. 102–06 (pp. 104–05) (19 September 1861).

However, the extracts from his letters of 1861 also adumbrate some of his later concerns. In particular, his shift from ‘narrow bigoted tenets’ to ‘latitudinarianism’ gestures towards his later heuristic method of using a variety of authorial identities to examine a problem from all points of view; and implicit in his worry that he is now ‘too sceptical as then too orthodox’ is his more mature avoidance of extremes, and the search for a middle way between faith and reason. I have shown that Butler adopted the dialogic form in his first response to the *Origin*, but in his biblical criticism, this multiplicity of authorial identities was not utilized until *The Fair Haven* in 1873. The *Evidence* is univocal, and straightforwardly rationalistic. In contrast to the difficulty the reader faces in distilling a coherent point of view in *The Fair Haven*, with its shifting perspectives and targets of satire, the simple message from the *Evidence* is that Christ did not die on the cross, and therefore that the Resurrection never happened, a conclusion Butler had come to a few years earlier. In a letter of 1862 he writes that ‘I came to see that the death of Jesus Christ was not real’.<sup>15</sup>

The authorial stance is given by the full title of the pamphlet: *The Evidence for the Resurrection of Jesus Christ as Given by the Four Evangelists Critically Examined*. Butler is setting himself up as impartial judge weighing the textual evidence of four witnesses. This self-effacement is reinforced by what was to become a characteristic disclaimer of Butler’s in the preface:

I do not wish to lay claim to any originality whatsoever. I can honestly say that all which I have here written has been thought out independently, but hundreds must have thought out, and many probably said, the same before me.<sup>16</sup>

He implicitly asserts the reasonableness of his argument, and therefore his own authority, by aligning it with that of ‘hundreds’ before him, who constitute a heterodox tradition. In a rehearsal of *Life and Habit*, in which he pre-empted charges of plagiarism of Hering, he goes on to regret his lack of knowledge of German, in order to claim that ‘I [...] have never read one of the German rationalistic books, but I am told that my argument is only a portion of what we have in Strauss and Bauer [*sic*], and many others’ (*SBR*, p. 15). There is no evidence that Butler is being anything but truthful in confessing his lack of German language skills, but, as in *Life and Habit*, the confession allows him to claim originality, even whilst denying it, and at the same time to call upon the support of

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<sup>15</sup> Cited in Jones, *Memoir*, I, 98 (14 August 1862).

<sup>16</sup> *Samuel Butler on the Resurrection*, ed. by Robert Johnstone (Gerrards Cross: Smythe, 1980), p. 15. Further references to this edition are given after quotations in the text and prefixed *SBR*.

acknowledged, if controversial, biblical authorities such as Strauss and Ferdinand Baur.<sup>17</sup> Nevertheless, this was an anonymous publication, so any benefits accruing from the self-serving rhetoric of humility that he would ascribe to Darwin are negated by the inability of the reader to bestow such benefits upon a name. Furthermore, Festing Jones describes the *Evidence* as Butler's 'apologia' for not becoming a clergyman (*Memoir*, I, 99). But again, in an anonymous pamphlet, who is actually delivering the apology, and to whom?

Butler's professed aim in writing the *Evidence* is to demonstrate that there is little reliable textual evidence from the Gospels that the Resurrection ever happened. He does this by critically examining each of these accounts, highlighting their irreconcilable discrepancies, particularly those between John and the Synoptic Gospels, and reconstructing what he believes to be the true account. This analysis serves to illuminate Butler's views on the variety of testimonies given in the Gospels. But interesting as it is in this respect, it does little to further Butler's argument. Rather, his demonstration that the Resurrection never happened can be reduced to an Aristotelian syllogism, even if this is hidden beneath his copious textual analysis. His two premises are that Christ was certainly seen alive after the Crucifixion, otherwise Christianity could never have spread (*SBR*, p. 17); and that miracles do not happen. The conclusion Butler ineluctably draws from his two premises, therefore, is that Christ never died on the cross. By definition, miracles are violations of the laws of nature, and contradict our experience of the uniformity of nature, one element of 'the holy trinity of agnosticism'.<sup>18</sup> Although Butler would continue to disavow any non-naturalistic explanations of alleged miracles, in his case this was not the basis for an incipient agnosticism.

In support of his second premise he draws upon Edward Gibbon's *History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (1776–89). The choice of Gibbon is significant. Butler had read *Decline and Fall* on the journey out to New Zealand, and he believes that from Gibbon he is 'imbibing a calm and philosophic spirit of impartial and critical investigation', which leads him to a rejection of dogma, and the weighing of alternative

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<sup>17</sup> Baur was the founder of the Tübingen School of New Testament theologians, which claimed that most of the books of the New Testament were the product of a synthesis in the second century of the opposing views of Petrinist Jewish Christians and Pauline Gentile Christians. Therefore, according to Baur, these books had little historic value in relation to the events that they recount, being written long after them. See Diarmaid MacCulloch, *A History of Christianity: The First Three Thousand Years* (London: Penguin, 2010), pp. 859, 941.

<sup>18</sup> According to Bernard Lightman, the other two are the concept of cause and effect, and 'the notion of an external, natural world'. See *The Origins of Agnosticism: Victorian Unbelief and the Limits of Knowledge* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987), p. 164.

points of view (*Memoir*, I, 97). The qualities he finds in Gibbon are similar to those he would admire, initially at least, in Darwin, as recorded in the ‘Dialogue’, and discussed in Chapter 2. Here he praised Darwin’s ‘judicial calmness’ and his ‘lawyer-like faculty of swearing both sides of a question’, qualities ‘essential for any really valuable and scientific investigation’ (*DOS*, p. 189).

In his rejection of the possibility of miracles, Butler constitutes part of the long line of British empiricism. Gibbon’s argument against miracles follows closely that of David Hume a few decades earlier in *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* (1748), and is also the line followed by Baden Powell in his contribution to *Essays and Reviews*, published in 1860. Powell argues that

the essential question of miracles stands quite apart from any consideration of *testimony*; the question would remain the same, if we had the evidence of our own senses to an alleged miracle, that is, to an extraordinary or inexplicable fact. It is not the *mere fact*, but the *cause* or *explanation* of it, which is the point at issue.<sup>19</sup>

Earlier in his essay, Powell had attacked William Paley’s rhetoric in *Evidences for Christianity* in terms identical to those in which Butler would later praise Gibbon and Darwin. He accuses Paley and his modern followers of acting as advocate rather than judge:

The whole argument is one of special pleading [...]; we do not find ourselves the more impressed with those high and sacred convictions of truth, which ought to result rather from the wary, careful, dispassionate summing-up on both sides, which is the function of the impartial and inflexible judge. (Powell, p. 131)

Like Gibbon, Hume, and Powell, Butler therefore dissociates the alleged occurrence of miracles from the related testimony. In his examination of the Gospels, the major contrast Butler makes is that between John and Matthew, favouring the former, and dismissing the latter. He does so on the basis of the number of miracles each Gospel recounts:

Of all the writers Matthew deals most largely in the marvellous and John the least. John is silent on the miraculous conception, the temptation in the wilderness [...], the transfiguration, the darkness and earthquake of the crucifixion and the ascension.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Baden Powell, ‘On the Study of the Evidences of Christianity’, in *Essays and Reviews*, pp. 94–144 (p. 141), emphasis in original.

<sup>20</sup> *SBR*, p. 39. Ernest Renan, also, dismisses these miraculous episodes in Matthew’s Gospel as legendary, and added at a later date. See *The Life of Jesus* (London: Trübner, 1864), p. 22.

Furthermore, in what amounts to a biblical example of Miranda Fricker's concept of epistemic injustice (see Chapter 2), he dismisses Mary Magdalene's testimony of the Resurrection on the basis of her identity (John 20. 1–13). When Peter and John went into the tomb they saw nothing except Christ's grave clothes; Mary saw two angels dressed in white:

Peter and John were men [...]. Mary was a woman — a woman whose parallel we must look for among Spanish or Italian women of the lower orders at the present day [...]. The evidence of women of her class and under such influences is not to be relied on in a matter of such importance as a miracle. (*SBR*, p. 23)

In a handwritten marginal note to one of the copies of the pamphlet held at the British Library, he adds: 'it would not be relied on now, and as far as we can see it was still less to be relied on then.'<sup>21</sup> This takes us back to Hume's and Gibbon's dissociation of the miracle from the testimony. For them, however reliable the authority, the fact of the miracle would not be admitted. For Butler, however, he uses the testimony of what he believes to be an impossibility to mark down Mary Magdalene as an unreliable observer based on her gender and class, drawing upon common cultural associations of women or the lower classes as superstitious and gullible.

Butler goes on to explain how the notion of miracles is culturally constructed: 'It was to [the apostles] what it is now among the lower classes of the Irish, French, Spanish, or Italian peasants' (*SBR*, p. 25). This may be an allusion to the dramatic increase in visions of the Virgin Mary in the nineteenth century. Diarmaid MacCulloch has written that in that period, the Virgin 'seems to have made more appearances all over Europe and Latin America than in any century before or since: generally to women without money, education or power and in remote locations' (*History of Christianity*, p. 819). The most famous of these visions was at Lourdes in 1858. Butler is explicitly associating those contemporary believers in miracles with Catholicism and the lower classes, and thereby seeks to undermine their epistemic credibility.

In *Erewhon Revisited*, he illustrates how alleged miracles come about, and how they have a naturalistic explanation. *Erewhon* ends as the unnamed narrator, identified as Higgs in *Erewhon Revisited*, escapes by balloon with his future wife, Arowhena. After Arowhena dies in 1890, Higgs returns to Erewhon under a disguise, and is horrified that a new religion, Sunchildism, has flourished in his name as a result of his supposed

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<sup>21</sup> [Samuel Butler], *The Evidence for the Resurrection of Jesus Christ* (British Library, shelf mark 03127.cc.14.(3.)), p. 7.

miraculous ascent. The book is narrated, perhaps not by chance, given Butler's views on the relative merits of the evangelists, by Higgs's son, John. *Erewhon Revisited* is Butler's own Gospel according to John, which offers a non-miraculous explanation of Higgs's balloon-propelled ascension. The analogy with the development of Christianity following the Resurrection and Ascension of Christ is obvious, although Butler strenuously denies in the preface that any analogy could be drawn between Christ and Higgs, who is 'a typical middle-class Englishman, deeply tainted with priggishness in his earlier years, but in great part freed from it by the sweet uses of adversity' (*ER*, p. xxiv).

In the *Evidence*, one of Butler's premises is that Christ was seen alive after the Crucifixion, otherwise Christianity would never have spread. When he compares Luke's Gospel with John's, he detects how John's account of Mary's testimony becomes embellished with the miraculous as a result of several decades of oral transmission: 'we know how among uneducated enthusiastic persons the marvellous has a constant tendency to become more marvellous still' (*SBR*, p. 28). In *Erewhon Revisited*, Higgs experiences at first hand how this process of oral transmission has transformed his balloon ascent into a miracle. Black and white storks that were flying near the balloon have become horses in the Erewhonian religious tradition, and are included in the painting of Higgs's ascent decorating the new church; and coprolites, assumed to have formed from excrement deposited by these flying horses, have been placed in the church's reliquary. However, it is important to recognize that Butler is not impugning the morality of those contemporary believers in miracles amongst Catholics or the lower classes, since their belief is sincere. Rather, Butler's discussion serves to highlight the hypocrisy of orthodox (and, implicitly male Protestant) professional defenders of miracles, such as Henry Alford, who had written 'by far the most popular commentary on the New Testament', and who exhibit wilful blindness — self-deception — in their refusal to consider naturalistic explanations.<sup>22</sup>

A critical review of Alford's apologetics in the *Literary Gazette* reports his self-professed method as based upon 'utmost honesty and boldness, utterly undeterred by any established opinions of an opposite nature' ('Alford's Greek Testament', p. 199). However, it avers that 'he has rather exaggerated his ideas of candour and freedom', and that 'he is so utterly opposed to any attempts to reconcile the discrepancies that exist between the Evangelists, that he will neglect or disallow any simple explanation

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<sup>22</sup> 'Alford's Greek Testament', *Literary Gazette*, 31 August 1861, pp. 198–200 (p. 198).

that lies on the surface' (p. 199). Alford was critical of the so-called harmonizers, of whom Butler was one, who attempted to reconstruct a true account of the Resurrection from four accounts that were irretrievably irreconcilable, in the absence of a hypothetical omniscience that would '[acquaint us] with every thing said and done in its order and exactness' (*SBR*, p. 33). For Alford, such a reconstruction was futile, because the putative, objectively true account of what happened is forever lost to us. Instead, our faith in the existence of this one objectively true account allows us to believe both John's naturalistic account as well as the contradictory supernatural account of Matthew. Alford's lack of candour, according to Butler, is demonstrated by his 'omit[ting] all notice of [the other evangelists] introducing matter which is absolutely incompatible with Matthew's accuracy' (*SBR*, p. 37). Similarly, as I argued in Chapter 2, it was the disjunction between Darwin's reputed candour and what Butler believed to be his actual duplicity that became a key target for Butler.

As a stamp of his own reasonableness, Butler appeals to what would be his preferred authority of the 'modern jury' in discussing John's account of the Crucifixion. Given the facts as detailed by John, he asks: 'would a modern jury believe that the death had been actual and complete?' (*SBR*, p. 41). In his discussion of Alford's commentaries on the Crucifixion, Butler concludes that they are not supported by John's account, and that Alford 'has been unable in this instance to attain that perfect honesty, that true manliness of argument, which the intense importance of the subject demands' (*SBR*, p. 45). And again, he appropriates authority for himself by appealing to the common sense of the general public, asserting that 'I am lost in wonderment that Dean Alford should suppose that such a style of argument could pass muster with any ordinarily intelligent person' (*SBR*, p. 46).

Although the *Evidence* purports to be a critical examination of the Gospel accounts of the Resurrection, which it does set out in detail, Butler's rationalistic argument is largely superfluous to his conclusion that Christ was not resurrected. For all his meticulous sifting of the evidence, and his weighing of the credibility of the Gospel accounts, his conclusion is based simply upon the empirical and naturalistic premise that miracles do not happen. The pamphlet is, therefore, more interesting as a text that illuminates Butler's early engagement with the problems of authority and authorship. It was the first of his works that opposed the authority of the professional, in this case Henry Alford, with the common sense of the layman. Despite his protestations in the preface that he could not find a publisher, similar contemporaneous works, such as *Ecce*



*Homo*, had been published, and had proved popular; and, in the wake of *Essays and Reviews*, Colenso's work on the Pentateuch, and the recent translation of Renan's *Vie de Jésus*, one cannot argue that Butler's ideas in the *Evidence*, or in his earlier letters in which he expresses Unitarian sympathies, were outside the mainstream of heterodox belief, or inconsistent with the conventional crisis-of-faith narrative. The anonymity of the pamphlet may have been dictated by Butler's unwillingness to offend his family, but it poses an interesting question regarding authority given that one of the reasons he places little reliance on Matthew's Gospel is that 'we know positively nothing' about him (*SBR*, pp. 32–33). Butler attempts to establish his own authority via his appeal both to established authorities such as Gibbon and the German biblical critics, as well as to the 'ordinarily intelligent person'. Moreover the pamphlet is significant for its introduction of the idea of self-deception, and its yoking, albeit tentatively and perhaps unconsciously at this stage, with the figure of the professional. When the *Evidence* came to be incorporated into *The Fair Haven*, Butler's conceptions of the relationship between authorship and authority, and of the status of the professional, were developed further.

### **Butler's rejection of rationalism**

When Butler published the *Evidence* in 1865, I have argued that it was a serious attempt to set out rationalistic arguments against a supernatural explanation of the Resurrection, for what he thought was the first time in English. In the preface to the *Evidence*, he writes that even though his argument may be wrong, at least by putting it in the public domain responses from his readers may lead to a movement towards the truth (*SBR*, p. 16). However, his desire was unfulfilled: the pamphlet was ignored, which explains the motivation behind the publication of *The Fair Haven* eight years later. This work comprises a 'Memoir' of John Pickard Owen, written ostensibly by his brother, William Bickersteth Owen, followed by the text 'The Fair Haven', written by John, and edited by William after John's death, which purports to be John's own attempt to reconcile rationalism with Christianity. Nearly half of 'The Fair Haven' is taken almost verbatim from the *Evidence* pamphlet, and in these chapters the attempts of Dean Alford to meet the arguments of German rationalistic critics are considered by John to be ill judged and disingenuous. Elinor Shaffer has quite correctly read the work as an 'ironic portrait' of Alford that paved the way for Lytton Strachey's sketch of Cardinal Manning in *Eminent*

*Victorians*.<sup>23</sup> However, it is also useful to read it as Butler's own response to the *Evidence*, forming part of a dialectic that sought to discover truth by examining the issue from all sides. Under the veil of pseudonymity, he was able to argue against his own rationalistic arguments in the *Evidence*, as well as those of Alford's.

The sub-title of *The Fair Haven* is important in several respects for the following discussion, and is thus worth citing in full: *A Work in Defence of the Miraculous Element in our Lord's Ministry upon Earth, both as against Rationalistic Impugners and Certain Orthodox Defenders, by the late John Pickard Owen, with a Memoir of the Author by William Bickersteth Owen*. First, therefore, the novel distinguishes between the miraculous and the non-miraculous elements of the Gospel narratives, and sets out to defend the former. This, obviously, is the antithesis of Butler's aim in the *Evidence*, which was to offer a rationalistic explanation for the miraculous element. Second, the title hints at Butler's seeking of a middle way between the extremes represented by 'Rationalistic Impugners' such as Strauss and the Tübingen school, and defenders of orthodoxy such as Alford. Jones later wrote that

in meditating on the subject Butler came to think that in the pamphlet on the Resurrection he had confined himself too closely to the intellectual view; man is capable also of an emotional view which deserves at least to be stated. If there is a domain of Reason, there is also a domain of Faith. (*Memoir*, I, 176)

At this time, rationalism and orthodoxy were seen as sitting at either extreme of the continuum of biblical interpretation. The *Fraser's* reviewer of *Ecce Homo* wrote of its author that 'the skin is the skin of the rationalist wolf, but the voice is the voice of the tamer and more orthodox animal'.<sup>24</sup> As Owen Chadwick has described it, 'the English had to choose between the Tübingen school [of Strauss and Baur] or an English scholarship too conservative to be credible'.<sup>25</sup>

The final point to be made about the full title is that John Owen's 'Defence' is framed by the 'Memoir' written by his brother William Bickersteth Owen. This framing allows Butler to construct the authorial identity of the fictitious author, and therefore to influence his readers' expectations and interpretations more than would be possible with a simple anonymous (or pseudonymous) work in the manner of the *Evidence*. The name

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<sup>23</sup> Elinor Shaffer, 'The Ironies of Biblical Criticism: From Samuel Butler's "Resurrection" Essay and *The Fair Haven* to *Erewhon Revisited*', in *Victorian Against the Grain*, ed. by Paradis, pp. 58–87 (p. 82).

<sup>24</sup> 'Ecce Homo', *Fraser's Magazine*, June 1866, pp. 746–65 (pp. 747–48).

<sup>25</sup> Chadwick, *Victorian Church*, II, 69. According to Chadwick it was Joseph Barber Lightfoot who succeeded in finding a middle way between these extremes in a series of commentaries on the books of the New Testament from the mid-1860s.

Bickersteth had strong theological connections, which may have added a patina of subliminal authenticity to Butler's subterfuge. The Bickersteth family supplied several eminent nineteenth-century theologians, including Edward Henry Bickersteth (1825–1906), who wrote the 'widely circulated' *Practical and Explanatory Commentary on the New Testament* (1864), as well as the memorial to his daughter, *The Master's Home-Call* (1872).<sup>26</sup> Edward Bickersteth's cousin, also called Edward Bickersteth (1814–1892), was Dean of Lichfield, where Butler's grandfather had been bishop. The elder Bickersteth had sat on the New Testament revision committee that had been set up in 1870 to revise the King James Version in the light of recent scholarship.<sup>27</sup> However, the name also gestures towards one of the many pseudonyms used by Jonathan Swift, 'Isaac Bickerstaff'. I have shown in Chapter 2 that Butler fashioned himself as part of a tradition of Menippean satirists stretching back to Lucian. His use of the name Bickersteth, may, therefore, be a ludic acknowledgement of his cultural inheritance.

The pseudonymous first edition of *The Fair Haven* was followed a few months later by a second, disclosing Butler's name on the title page, 'Author of "Erewhon"', and including an explanatory preface. The first edition had been reviewed broadly positively, as Butler acknowledged in the preface, with only the pseudonymous author of the pamphlet *Jesus versus Christianity* piercing Butler's subterfuge, describing *The Fair Haven* as 'an ironical defence of orthodoxy at the expense of the whole mass of church tenet and dogma, the character of Christ only excepted', and which 'scathingly exposes' the disingenuousness of William Paley and Dean Alford.<sup>28</sup>

Predictably, however, when Butler disclosed himself as the author in the second edition, the reception was almost unremittingly hostile. This repeats the pattern of *Erewhon*, for which sales dropped markedly once Butler's authorship was disclosed (see Chapter 1). In the preface to the second edition of *The Fair Haven* Butler explains why he had hidden behind two pseudonyms: '[since he] had been suspected of satire once [in *Erewhon*], [he] might be suspected again with no greater reason.'<sup>29</sup> However genuine one believes these protestations of innocence to be, it is indubitably true that a text bearing the name of a well-known satirist would be interpreted very differently from one whose authorship bore the impress of a name with authentic theological overtones.

<sup>26</sup> Stephen Gregory, 'Bickersteth, Edward Henry (1825–1906)', *ODNB* <doi:10.1093/ref:odnb/31876>.

<sup>27</sup> E. I. Carlyle, 'Bickersteth, Edward (1814–1892)', rev. by H. C. G. Matthew, *ODNB* <doi:10.1093/ref:odnb/2346>.

<sup>28</sup> A Cantab., *Jesus versus Christianity*, pp. 9, 10.

<sup>29</sup> *Shrewsbury Edition*, ed. by Jones and Bartholomew, III: *The Fair Haven*, p. xviii. Further references to this volume are given after quotations in the text and prefixed *FH*.

Butler's authorship, however, was not entirely unknown. He sent a copy to Charles Darwin, admitting that he had written it.<sup>30</sup> Darwin was impressed, and replied that 'you will soon be universally known. Leslie Stephen, a regular reviewer, who was lunching here, knew you were the author.' Darwin goes on to praise Butler for his 'dramatic power', and his ability to 'earnestly and thoroughly assume the character and think the thoughts of the man you pretend to be. Hence I conclude that you could write a really good novel.'<sup>31</sup> Butler began this novel a few months later, and it eventually became *The Way of All Flesh*. This deals with the same material as the *Evidence* and *The Fair Haven* from the point of view of a clergyman, Ernest Pontifex, who is ordained, unlike Butler, before he is persuaded by rationalistic arguments. Butler returned to this theme in 'A Clergyman's Doubts' in the *Examiner* in 1879, in which the pointedly named 'Earnest Clergyman' finds himself in a similar, but not identical, position to that of Ernest Pontifex.

The preface to the second edition of *The Fair Haven* ends with a statement of Butler's strongly held belief in the primacy of the individual conscience, and of his hope that via the instrumentality of his irony, which he believed to be heavy-handed enough to be apparent, the reader would arrive at a more considered view of the foundations of their own beliefs:

I am not responsible for the interpretations of my readers. It is only natural that the same work should present a very different aspect according as it is approached from one side or the other. There is only one way out of it — that the reader should kindly interpret according to his own fancies [...]. I have done the best I can for all parties, and feel justified in appealing to the existence of the widely conflicting opinions which I have quoted, as a proof that the balance has been evenly held, and that I was justified in calling the book a defence — both as against impugners and defenders. (*FH*, p. xxii)

The final statement shows how far he had progressed from the almost unalloyed rationalism of the *Evidence*, and signals, therefore, a decisive step in his search for a middle way between faith and reason.

Due to its fictional nature none of the readers of *The Fair Haven* would know anything about John Owen other than from the 'Memoir' written by his brother that precedes his text. Butler therefore constructs for the unwary reader a nested set of

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<sup>30</sup> It will be remembered that in the preface to the second edition of *Erewhon*, he claims that he had no intention of 'reduc[ing] Mr Darwin's theory to an absurdity' (*E*, p. 29). This apparently genuine gift to Darwin a few months later therefore goes some way to corroborate the view that at this point, in 1873, he still respected Darwin.

<sup>31</sup> Cited in Jones, *Memoir*, I, 186–87 (p. 187) (1 April [1873]).

authorial identities through which the text is mediated and which serve to influence its reception. The ‘death’ of John is a fiction constructed by Butler which conveniently closes the text to the awkwardness of any further authorial explications in response to readers’ correspondence, but it is not until his confessional preface to the second edition that he can also ‘relieve [them] from uneasiness as to any further writings from the pen of the surviving brother’ (*FH*, p. xix). Given that much of John’s text is a discussion of the veracity or otherwise of eyewitness testimony, it may be significant that most of John’s life as recounted by William in his ‘Memoir’ is not William’s eyewitness testimony at all, since, from 1847 or 1848, aged fourteen, up until 1868, he was working in America. Rather, William’s account relies heavily upon John’s letters, raising the structural complexity of the text even higher.

However, rather than clarifying the meaning of the text, lifting the veil of pseudonymity in the second edition only serves to muddy the waters further. For the fictional John Owen, framing his work with a ‘Memoir’ conforming to the generic conventions of a reconversion narrative raises expectations in the reader that Butler has mischievously fulfilled. Notwithstanding Butler’s protestations of heavy-handed irony, it is *The Fair Haven*’s very plausibility that obscures this irony. One is reminded of Daniel Defoe’s satirical pamphlet ‘The Shortest Way with the Dissenters’ (1702), in which the wholesale slaughter of dissenters is advocated. Wayne Booth writes that one of the reasons that Defoe deceived his readers was that ‘even after we are alerted to irony, we cannot discover from the pamphlet alone what Defoe’s position is’.<sup>32</sup> This, I feel, is also the reason why *The Fair Haven* eludes easy analysis. The use of the nested set of authorial identities, expanded by the presence of Butler in the second edition, engenders a splintering of the integrity of a unified authorial presence. Through this method, however, Butler is able to achieve his ideal of approaching a problem from a variety of viewpoints. He had achieved this in a rudimentary fashion in his early ‘Dialogue’ on the *Origin* in the *Christchurch Press* in 1862, and would achieve it again in the adoption of a series of pseudonyms in ‘A Clergyman’s Doubts’ in 1879. Given such a desire for multivocality, it is ironic in itself that in the *Evidence*, Butler is troubled by the lack of harmony in the Gospel accounts of the Crucifixion and Resurrection, as it is precisely the multivocal account of the Resurrection that leads him to write the pamphlet. Furthermore, although the various sects John joins on his religious journey — Baptists,

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<sup>32</sup> Wayne C. Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961), p. 319.

Roman Catholics, Deists — are castigated by William as each presenting only ‘one aspect of religious truth’, together they represent a multivocal account of belief, and his experience enables John to ‘bec[o]me perhaps the widest-minded and most original thinker whom [William has] ever met’ (*FH*, p. 18).

In the ‘Memoir’, William includes a long letter in which John defends Alford’s apparent belief in both Luke’s and Matthew’s accounts of the Resurrection, despite their inconsistencies, against an attack by the author of the anonymous and rationalistic *Jesus of History* (1869), later known to have been Sir Richard Davies Hanson. Like Seeley in *Ecce Homo*, Hanson treats Christ as entirely human; and as Arnold did in *Literature and Dogma*, he ‘subject[s] the various accounts of [Christ’s] life to the same species of criticism that would be applied to purely secular literature’, a method that ‘is necessary, if any historical certainty is to be hoped for’.<sup>33</sup> John’s explanation of Alford’s belief is that:

the objective truth lies somewhere between [Luke’s and Matthew’s accounts], and is of very little importance, being long dead and buried, and living in its results only, in comparison with the subjective truth conveyed by both the narratives, which lives in our hearts independently of precise knowledge concerning the actual facts. (*FH*, p. 27)

He believes that Alford has taken the right course, guided ‘more perhaps by spiritual instinct than by conscious and deliberate exercise of his intellectual faculties’; and that ‘compromise [...] is a solemn duty in the interests of Christian peace’ (*FH*, p. 28). The passage is important for its hesitant subordination of conscious intellection to unconscious instinct, an epistemic hierarchy that would be developed more fully and confidently a few years later in *Life and Habit*, in which Butler argued that instinct was synonymous with inherited memory (*LH*, Chapter 11). However, that these virtues are ascribed to Alford, against whom Butler had strongly argued in the *Evidence*, complicates matters. In this letter, who, or what is the target of Butler’s satire? The matter is complicated further by John’s apparent agreement with the argument of *Jesus of History*, but not with its ‘impotent conclusion’ (*FH*, p. 29). John himself, then, in this letter is also struggling to reconcile the two apparently contradictory commentaries of Alford and the author of *Jesus of History*, just as Alford is struggling to reconcile the contradictory commentaries of Luke and Matthew.

An explanation can be offered in suggesting that John’s uncertainty was very much Butler’s own at the time. The epistemological certainty of the existence and

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<sup>33</sup> [Sir Richard Davies Hanson], *The Jesus of History* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1869), p. xx.

discoverability of an absolute truth, as argued for in the *Evidence*, was now open to question. William describes the similar internal struggle that John was experiencing:

He seems to have been alternately under the influence of two conflicting spirits — at one time writing as though there were nothing precious under the sun except logic, consistency, and precision, and breathing fire and smoke against even very trifling deviations from the path of exact criticism — at another, leading the reader almost to believe that he disregarded the value of any objective truth, and speaking of endeavour after accuracy in terms that are positively contemptuous. (*FH*, p. 29)

John's epistemological psychomachia (and, I would argue, Butler's too) is eventually resolved via a two-fold repudiation of the idea of a single objective truth. After reading the New Testament parables he realizes that 'there are many things which though not objectively true are nevertheless subjectively true to those who can receive them; and subjective truth is universally felt to be even higher than objective' (*FH*, p. 34). Second, he realizes that truth comes into being and accretes over long periods of time, eventually hardening into custom or tradition that is best left alone and accepted:

If in our narrow and unsympathetic strivings after precision we should remove the hallowed imperfections whereby Time has set the glory of his seal upon the Gospels as well as upon all other aged things, not for twenty generations will they resume that ineffable and inviolable aspect which our fussy meddlesomeness will have disturbed. (*FH*, p. 35)

However, such a belief in the sanctity of tradition raises objections. If survival over long periods of time is a marker of truth one has to explain how unfit ideas persist. In Chapter 5 I show how Butler's own 'fussy meddlesomeness' in the matter of the authorship of the *Odyssey* disturbed this idea of truth as tradition. One also has to reconcile this belief with Butler's seemingly contradictory attack on the blind deference to tradition. The answer lies in the analogy Butler makes between the evolution of ideas and that of organisms, which I discuss in Chapter 4 in relation to his Lamarckian aesthetics. Cultural tradition is akin to the accumulated inherited memories of the organism. Although these unconscious memories exert a powerful influence, this does not preclude our desire-driven ability to transcend this influence by action. To the extent of our success, the resulting newly acquired memories and characteristics will be inherited in Lamarckian fashion by our offspring, adding to their own inherited memory. Blind deference to tradition is analogous to inaction, to the organism's passive acquiescence to the pull of their past. For Butler, ideas, individuals, and civilizations evolve via this constructive tension between past and present. They do so because new

ideas and characteristics acquired are able to accumulate and be inherited by future generations.

William describes John's shift from logic and consistency to inconsistency by comparing his juvenilia with his more mature writings. The younger John was 'a true lover of consistency, it was intolerable to him to say one thing with his lips and another with his actions' (*FH*, p. 47). However, years later, he 'learned to recognize the value of a certain amount of inaccuracy and inconsistency' (*FH*, p. 48). Even in mathematics, 'the most exact of the sciences', the definitions of the line and a point, absolutely fundamental to its practice, are themselves based upon compromise (*FH*, p. 49). John's reconversion was facilitated by the analogy he made between mathematics and religious belief:

He did not conclude that because the evidences for mathematics were founded upon compromises and definitions which are inaccurate — therefore that mathematics were false [...], but he learnt to feel that there might be other things which were no less indisputable than mathematics, and which might also be founded on facts for which the evidences were not wholly free from inconsistencies and inaccuracies. (*FH*, pp. 49–50)

Ultimately, therefore, all knowledge, whether secular or sacred, must be based upon principles that cannot be proved by the logical and consistent use of reason. The unspoken conclusion is that faith must be the ultimate ground of knowledge.

John's theological trajectory, a reconversion narrative, can be read as exemplifying similar issues wrestled with by Butler, and which map Butler's development since the *Evidence* pamphlet. First, William describes John as moving from a belief in the primacy of objective truth to one in which truth was found subjectively in one's conscience. Second, John becomes sceptical that absolute truth is attainable; rather, truth evolves gradually through custom and tradition. Third, John's juvenilia exhorted consistency of thought, but he came to understand the value and necessity of inconsistency. In one of his notebooks, Butler contrasts his father's narrow reliance on consistency with his own realization that inconsistency is essential for human life: 'Inconsistency is a vice which degrades human nature and levels man with the brute. — Rev. Thomas Butler [Butler's father]. Logic and consistency are luxuries for the gods and the lower animals. — Samuel Butler.'<sup>34</sup> Finally, in his recognition that even mathematics is founded upon empirically unprovable axioms, he saw no reason why Christianity should not be likewise. Nevertheless, this trajectory is by no means

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<sup>34</sup> *Further Extracts*, ed. by Bartholomew, p. 280.



unproblematic, and reflects Butler's own unresolved issues at the time of writing, in particular that of the reconciliation of rationalism with Christianity. 'The Fair Haven' is John's attempt 'to establish the Resurrection [...] upon a basis which should satisfy the most imperious demands of modern criticism', that is, those of rationalists, as well as 'a no less convincing proof that Rationalists are right in demurring to the historical accuracy of much which has been too obstinately defended by so-called orthodox writers' (*FH*, p. 55).

Having been told that John had 'made it perfectly clear that he was not going to deceive himself' we can be fairly certain that this is exactly what he will do (*FH*, p. 51). In particular, he rationalizes some of the details in the Gospels in the contorted manner of Philip Henry Gosse in *Omphalos* (1857). In this work, Gosse attempted to reconcile the geological record with the Genesis account of creation by arguing that God had created rocks with fossils already embedded.<sup>35</sup> Whether or not Butler had Gosse in mind as an object of satire, the closing paragraph of *The Fair Haven* bears a close resemblance to Gosse's preface. Gosse's aim is 'that the thousands of thinking persons, who are scarcely satisfied with the extant reconciliations of Scriptural statements and Geological deductions [...] may find, in the principle set forth in this volume, a stable resting-place' (pp. vii–viii). John ends 'The Fair Haven' triumphantly. He believes he has been able to reconcile rationalism with Christianity by supplying the element omitted in all previously unsuccessful attempts: 'If [the reader] asks me what element I allude to, I answer Candour. This is the pilot that has taken us safely into the Fair Haven of universal brotherhood in Christ' (*FH*, p. 246). That he dies of 'some obscure disease of the brain', leaving his manuscript incomplete and fragmentary is testament to the futility of his task (*FH*, p. 56). It is precisely the *lack* of candour that Butler believed was tantamount to self-deception.

In common with Butler, John Owen's crisis of faith begins with his scepticism regarding the efficacy of infant baptism and ends within the Broad Church. John dies aged forty; *The Fair Haven* was published when Butler was thirty-seven. In the years following the publication of the *Evidence* pamphlet, Butler had learned the lessons of John's cautionary tale and the futility of the attempt to reconcile rationalism with Christianity. Although Alford is criticized for his lack of candour, Butler nevertheless recognizes like him that the Gospel narratives cannot be harmonized, and thus

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<sup>35</sup> *Omphalos: An Attempt to Untie the Geological Knot* (London: van Voorst, 1857), p. 347.

acknowledges the impossibility of discovering a single absolute truth. Within Butler's reconversion narrative, *The Fair Haven* shows a clear progression from the unalloyed rationalism of the *Evidence* pamphlet. By the time he had finished *The Way of All Flesh* he had formulated his own evolutionary theory as well as clearly distinguishing between Darwinian 'luck' and Lamarckian 'cunning'. The relative fates of Butler's two alter egos, John Owen and Ernest Pontifex, reflect the progress he had made as a result of his Lamarckian ideas.

### ***The Way of All Flesh* and 'A Clergyman's Doubts'**

Butler started writing *The Way of All Flesh* in 1873 and worked on it intermittently until 1885.<sup>36</sup> Due to its thinly veiled and very unflattering portraits of certain family members, it remained unpublished in his lifetime and was published posthumously in 1903, after some necessary editing by his literary executor, R. A. Streatfeild, of the slightly incomplete manuscript. Like 'A Clergyman's Doubts', the novel examines, amongst many other issues, the options open to a young clergyman when he comes to doubt the supernatural and miraculous explanation of the Resurrection, as narrated in the Gospel accounts. Together with *The Fair Haven*, these texts represent counterfactual accounts of Butler's own spiritual coming-of-age. Both *The Way of All Flesh* and *The Fair Haven* use homodiegetic narrators that serve to put ironic distance between Butler and his alter egos. If, as Shaffer argues, *The Fair Haven* is an ironic portrait of Alford, it is also, along with *The Way of All Flesh*, an ironic self-portrait of Butler himself. In the latter novel, Edward Overton narrates the life to date of his godson, Ernest Pontifex. In effect, Butler comments on the shortcomings of his younger self through the mediation of Overton.<sup>37</sup> He is thus able to give the appearance of a dispassionate third-party commentary on the development of his own ideas, which would be difficult to sustain in a more conventional autobiography. Ernest, in fact, in a metafictional twist, is aware that Overton is writing a book about his life, which is of course the book that Butler is writing about *his* life. Discussing a letter his mother had written years before, Ernest tells Overton that "if you do what you have sometimes talked about and turn the adventures

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<sup>36</sup> Letter to Eliza Savage, cited in Jones, *Memoir*, II, 1 (16 August 1873).

<sup>37</sup> For a similar suggestion, see Regenia Gagnier, *Subjectivities: A History of Self-Representation in Britain, 1832–1920* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), p. 231.

of my unworthy self into a novel, mind you print this letter”’.<sup>38</sup> Curiously, also, because of the incompleteness of the manuscript, Streatfeild as editor had to construct chapters 4 and 5 from the fragmentary notes Butler had left. There is no reason to suppose that Butler desired anything other than a complete manuscript to be left at his death. Unlike John Owen, whose papers were found to be, on his death, ‘in the most deplorable confusion’ (*FH*, p. 56), Butler had spent years ordering and annotating his own papers to facilitate their posthumous publication. However, these two chapters were particularly critical of Ernest’s grandfather, and in Chapter 5 I suggest that Butler had removed them during the time when he was writing the *Life and Letters* of his own grandfather, after realizing that the portrait of him in *The Way of All Flesh* was misrepresentative.

Susan Haack has described *The Way of All Flesh* as ‘one of the finest epistemological novels ever written’.<sup>39</sup> The evolution of Ernest’s epistemology is traced through his changing religious views and is developed more fully than is John Owen’s. *The Way of All Flesh* also conforms more to the generic conventions of the *Bildungsroman* in that Ernest eventually finds his own place in society, whereas John Owen does not. As a child and young adult, Ernest exhibits the blind deference to the traditional authority figures that Butler condemned. Like Butler he studies for ordination at Cambridge, but unlike him Ernest is persuaded that Henry Alford has successfully refuted the arguments of the German rationalistic critics. Just before ordination, he attends a sermon by the Evangelical preacher, Gideon Hawke, and becomes an ultra-Evangelical, having been impressed by Hawke’s ‘logical consistency, freedom from exaggeration, and profound air of conviction’ (*WF*, p. 248). However, he soon converts to the High Church party, under the influence of a fellow curate. During a discussion with one of his parishioners, the freethinker Shaw, he betrays his ignorance of the various Gospel accounts of the Resurrection. He reads Alford again and realizes that the accounts cannot be harmonized, but cannot heed Alford’s advice and take them on trust. Following a misunderstanding with a fellow tenant, whom he wrongly believes to be a prostitute, he is imprisoned for sexual assault, and decides that he cannot remain a clergyman, adopting instead a fervent rationalism. He is released from prison, not uncoincidentally, on 30 September 1859, the same day that Butler sailed from England for New

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<sup>38</sup> *The Way of All Flesh*, ed. by James Cochrane (London: Penguin, 1986), p. 409. Further references to this edition are given after quotations in the text and prefixed *WF*. The letter to which Ernest refers was written by Butler’s mother to her sons, and is reproduced almost verbatim in the novel (*WF*, pp. 133–35). For the original letter, see *Family Letters*, ed. by Silver, pp. 40–42 (6 February 1841).

<sup>39</sup> Susan Haack, ‘The Ideal of Intellectual Integrity in Life and Literature’, *New Literary History*, 36 (2005), 359–73, (p. 361).

Zealand.<sup>40</sup> However, on his release, he apprehends the provisionality and relativity of truth and the limitations of reason: ‘Truth is what commends itself to the great majority of sensible and successful people’, but there are exceptions to this ‘rough and ready rule-of-thumb’, which ‘made it impossible to reduce life to an exact science’. In these cases, it was better to abandon reason, and follow one’s instinct, ‘the ultimate court of appeal’, and ‘a mode of faith in the evidence of things not actually seen’ (*WF*, pp. 305, 306). Ernest’s spiritual journey, like Butler’s, ends in his own crisis of doubt, and the subordination of reason to faith. However, in contrast to John Owen, and to Timothy Larsen’s group of secularists who reconvert to a recognizable form of orthodox Christianity, the reconversion of both Ernest and Butler is to a faith more secular than religious. Butler here comes close to a critique of Auguste Comte’s three-stage evolution of human society, from the theological, through the metaphysical (or rational), to culminate in the positivist scientism of an advanced society. But for Ernest and Butler, a positivist worldview is inadequate because life cannot be reduced to ‘an exact science’.

Regenia Gagnier reads *The Way of All Flesh* as representing Butler’s desire ‘to be free from the determinism — in [his] Lamarckian view, evolutionary biological determinism — of the patriarchal system’ (*Subjectivities*, p. 232). However, the novel says more than this about Butler’s Lamarckism. In particular, Ernest’s epistemological development can be read as the ontogenic recapitulation of the evolution of human civilization, and represents an alternative to both orthodox Christianity and Comte’s religion of humanity. In Chapter 4 I show how Ernst Haeckel’s recapitulation theory provides Butler with an idealized model for the development of art via the evolution over their lifetimes of his favourite artists. Likewise, in *The Way of All Flesh*, the culmination of Ernest’s epistemological development is Butler’s statement of his Utopian telos of a culture where authority comes to reside in ‘the great majority of sensible and successful people’, rather than in the Church or the newly professionalized scientific institutions. Unlike Butler, Ernest has two children from his short and bigamous marriage, and he seeks to insulate them from the determinism of the patriarchal system by having them adopted by a Gravesend bargeman and his wife: ‘comfortable, well-grown folks, in whose hands young people would be likely to have as fair a chance of coming to a good development as in those of any whom he knew’ (*WF*, p. 373). In this

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<sup>40</sup> In his introduction, Richard Hoggart argues that Ernest’s time in prison is the ‘fictional equivalent of [Butler’s] New Zealand experience’ (*WF*, p. 8). However, given the specific dating, it is more likely that Ernest’s imprisonment represents Butler’s time in England under parental and pedagogic authority. Butler’s first night at sea is the first on which he did not say his prayers (Jones, *Memoir*, I, 71).

manner, he hopes they may acquire characteristics from their non-biological parents that will be inherited in turn by their children, thus eventually diluting the suffocating ancestral presence of his own parents and grandfather.

Like John Owen's 'Memoir', and *The Way of All Flesh*, the polypseudonymous correspondence 'A Clergyman's Doubts' is a counterfactual version of Butler's own biography. The correspondence was published in the *Examiner* between February and May 1879, during the time in which, according to Jones, '[Butler] was then re-writing that part of *The Way of All Flesh* which deals with Ernest's mental development when he was troubled by religious doubt' (*Memoir*, I, 298). This correspondence bears a close resemblance to Ernest's one book that brought him fame: an anonymous 'series of semi-theological, semi-social essays, purporting to have been written by six or seven different people, and viewing the same class of subjects from different standpoints' (*WF*, p. 413). 'A Clergyman's Doubts' masquerades as a genuine correspondence, initiated by a letter from 'An Earnest Clergyman', who recounts how he also lost faith in the objective truth of the Resurrection after reading *Essays and Reviews*, the *Origin of Species*, and Bishop Colenso's work on the Pentateuch in the mid-1860s.<sup>41</sup> The clergyman asks whether he should resign his living, thus consigning his family to poverty, or deceive his parishioners by concealing his loss of faith, but thereby retaining his living. He condemns the tyranny of the authority of his teachers in childhood who taught him to accept miracles as self-evident. Moreover, they never made their students aware that there had been challenges to the authority of Paley and Bishop Butler; and Strauss, if mentioned at all, was dismissed as a shallow Rationalist. In his younger days, just after he had lost his faith, he could conceive of no 'middle position between a frank acceptance and a no less frank rejection of the mysteries' of, for instance, the New Testament miracles (*CD*, pp. 58–62).

Butler participates under several other pseudonyms, the main ones being 'Cantab', 'Oxoniensis', and 'Ethics', each offering a different point of view. 'Cantab' argues that there is in fact a middle way that a sceptical clergyman can follow. He states his thesis thus:

The common practice of assuming that the current doctrines of Christianity must be either wholly true or wholly false is irrational. In consequence, whoever rejects the supernatural side of the Church's teaching is not necessarily unfit to assist that teaching on its practical or the moral side. (*CD*, p. 80)

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<sup>41</sup> 'A Clergyman's Doubts' in *Shrewsbury Edition*, ed. by Jones and Bartholomew, XVIII: *Collected Essays*, vol. I, 51–99 (pp. 56–57). Further references to this correspondence are given after quotations in the text and prefixed *CD*.

More specifically, even if the doctrine of the Atonement is rejected, this is no reason why one cannot uphold ‘the ideal of conduct exemplified in the life of Christ’ (*CD*, p. 75). He advises that the clergyman should remain within the Church, and attempt to improve its moral side, whilst having as little as possible to do with the evils of its dogmatic side. Interestingly, ‘Cantab’ cites approvingly, and apparently without irony, from John Morley’s *On Compromise* (1874). Butler had met Morley once at a dinner just after the publication of *Erewhon*, and ‘disliked and distrusted’ him (Jones, *Memoir*, I, 154). Referring to Morley’s essay, and concurring with Butler’s own distrust of the professional, ‘Cantab’ writes that the dilemma faced by any sceptical clergyman ‘is inevitable while the priestly profession exists’.<sup>42</sup> Of course, by concealing his scepticism whilst continuing to be a paid member of the Church the sceptical clergyman is open to the charge of dishonesty. However, ‘Cantab’ rejects the idea that there is an absolute standard of morality, recognizing instead ‘that morality is the concern of human beings with imperfect facilities and strong temptations’ (*CD*, p. 81). He cites the example of Giordano Bruno and Galileo, who were both tried by the Inquisition for alleged heresy. Bruno did not lie, and was burnt at the stake; Galileo, in contrast, concealed his true beliefs, recanted, and was spared. ‘Cantab’ asks whether anyone, given the circumstances, would condemn Galileo for lying (*CD*, p. 81). The obvious analogy made is that, given the circumstances in which the ‘Earnest Clergyman’ finds himself, no one should condemn him for concealing his true beliefs.

In contrast to ‘Cantab’, ‘Oxoniensis’ does not believe there is a middle way: one either accepts the Bible in its entirety, or not at all: ‘Either Christianity is the revelation of all truth, or it is, so far as its supernatural claims go, a living lie; and the conscience must view it in the one light or the other’ (*CD*, p. 69). ‘Cantab’s’ suggested solution is akin to perjuring God, and even death is preferable to this. Implicitly, therefore, Bruno’s course of action is more honourable than Galileo’s. However, ‘Oxoniensis’ appears not to believe in an absolute objective truth; rather, he sees truth as emerging dialectically, in the manner of the trajectory of Butler’s own reconversion narrative: ‘it is by the successive processes of belief and scepticism that mankind advances in the knowledge of the truth’ (*CD*, p. 78).

Butler’s use of the Latin names signifying Cambridge and Oxford for two of his pseudonyms is significant. Ruth Gounelas has shown how mid-nineteenth-century

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<sup>42</sup> *CD*, p. 64. ‘Cantab’s’ letter was written, however, several months before Butler’s very public quarrel with Darwin over the publication of Krause’s biography of Erasmus Darwin.

Cambridge thought was characterized by its impartiality, in contrast to the ‘fierce partisanship’ prevailing at Oxford.<sup>43</sup> Although Gounelas does not discuss ‘A Clergyman’s Doubts’, Butler’s choice of pseudonyms reflects the different modes of thought practised at these two universities. Such a distinction also corresponds to that Butler makes between the impartial judge and the paid advocate, and suggests that in the correspondence he has more sympathy with the latitudinarian ‘Cantab’ than the dogmatic ‘Oxoniensis’. That Butler has ‘Oxoniensis’ quote approvingly from the anonymous *Elements of Social Science* (1885) corroborates this. ‘Oxoniensis’ censures ‘Cantab’ for advocating a ‘sacrifice of conviction to expediency’, and, citing a ‘great writer’, warns that this is the result of ““a conspicuous want of *manliness* [...], a pervading timidity in declaring our real convictions on the most important matters, especially religion”” (CD, p. 78, emphasis in original). *The Elements of Social Science* was known as the ‘Bible of the Brothel’ and was a disguised autobiographical account of the life of the freethinker and advocate of contraception George Drysdale, who recounts his early sexual problems before championing an active sex life as the key to mental and physical health.<sup>44</sup> According to Larsen, even the vast majority of Drysdale’s fellow Secularists viewed the work as immoral (Larsen, p. 122). The favourable use of this text emphasizes the hypocrisy of the dogmatic theologians whom Butler hated, and of which ‘Oxoniensis’ was one.

The reference to Drysdale’s work may also explain why Butler chose to have Ernest Pontifex jailed for sexual assault rather than any other crime. In *The Way of All Flesh*, Towneley, the epitome of good breeding, regularly visits the prostitute who is a tenant in the same house as Ernest. For Butler, physical and mental health went hand in hand, and Towneley’s active sex life is indicative of his overall good health, as it was for Drysdale. It may be no coincidence that after Ernest’s frustrated attempt to have sex with the innocent Miss Maitland, he suffers a mental collapse whilst in prison. Butler’s satirical inversion of the duality of the physical and the mental is enacted memorably in *Erewhon*. There, Butler depicts physical disease as a crime and criminality as an ailment to be cured: criminality as a disease of the mind. This inversion illustrates Butler’s harmonization of mind and matter, a harmonization manifest also in his conception of God, which I discuss below, in the section on agnosticism.

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<sup>43</sup> Ruth Gounelas, ‘Samuel Butler’s Cambridge Background, and *Erewhon*’, *English Literature in Transition, 1880–1920*, 24 (1981), 17–39 (pp. 18, 20).

<sup>44</sup> J. Miriam Benn, ‘Drysdale, George (1824–1904)’, *ODNB* <doi:10.1093/ref:odnb/39447>.

Having considered the situation from all possible sides, the ‘Earnest Clergyman’ writes a concluding letter, summarizing his position vis-à-vis those of, in particular, ‘Cantab’ and ‘Oxoniensis’. Like the latter, he agrees that the prevailing ‘moral and intellectual cowardice’ will lead to a degeneration of society (*CD*, p. 92). Much earlier than this, in the preface to the *Evidence*, Butler, too, complained that the impossibility of his finding a publisher was due to the cowardice of the public (*SBR*, p. 16). As Butler himself advocated, the clergyman comes to his conclusions via personal experience rather than by mere reason and adherence to abstract first principles. The clergyman endorses the relativistic view that ‘for some men and under certain circumstances, keeping to a false position and making the best of it is a truer and therefore higher course than abandoning it in disgust’ (*CD*, p. 92). His personal experience suggests that he can have a greater beneficial effect on his parishioners by making the best of his false position. Using evolutionary discourse, he argues that because everything has been shown to be in flux, including the forms of life, and therefore the consciences of those lives, standards of morality are not absolute but relative: ‘he who adopts a shifting standard of morals, making it, nevertheless, as little shifting as he can, takes at once the more manly and more arduous view of his position and responsibilities’ (*CD*, p. 94). In an illustration of how Butler’s dialectic has arrived at this conclusion, what was earlier the compromise of ‘Cantab’ has now evolved into an extreme position to be contrasted with that of ‘Oxoniensis’. The ‘Earnest Clergyman’ concludes that he will take the middle way between the inflexible morality of ‘Oxoniensis’ and the morality of ‘Cantab’ that is so lax that ‘it seems as though truth and honour come to be words with but little meaning’ (*CD*, p. 96).

‘A Clergyman’s Doubts’ is the most striking illustration of how Butler used a variety of pseudonyms in order to pick his way through a seemingly intractable moral and epistemological problem, and to arrive at a conclusion that was conformable with an experiential existence — that is, ‘convenient’ — rather than with a metaphysical abstraction. It also helps to illustrate some of the same issues Butler was grappling with as he was writing *The Way of All Flesh*. Both the ‘Earnest Clergyman’ and Ernest Pontifex come to realize that compromise is the safest way to negotiate life. This has been discussed earlier, but it is worth emphasizing again that Butler thought this principle important enough to be the subject of the epigraphs of two of his books. The obverse of compromise is the practice of extreme behaviour, and for Butler, this was tantamount to the crime of following reason and logic rather than instinct and faith:



Extremes are alone logical, and they are always absurd, the mean is alone practicable and it is always illogical. It is faith and not logic which is the supreme arbiter [...]. Sensible people will get through life by rule of thumb as they may interpret it most conveniently without asking too many questions for conscience sake. (*WF*, pp. 327–28)

Of course, this leads to the charge of inconsistency, but for Ernest, as well as for Butler, inconsistency was necessary for a comfortable life. Ernest came to believe that the important aspect of following any profession is to do so with ‘charitable inconsistency’ (*WF*, p. 322). And as noted above, Butler wrote that ‘logic and consistency are luxuries for the gods and the lower animals’. To act inconsistently, however, also leads to some apparent absurdities. In a comic passage, Ernest decides to be inconsistent by playing the organ in the prison chapel even though he has renounced his Christian faith: ‘Having, then, once introduced an element of inconsistency into his system, he was far too consistent not to be inconsistent consistently, and he lapsed ere long into an amiable indifferentism’ (*WF*, p. 323). He ‘takes the sacrament duly once a year [...] lest he should again feel strongly upon any subject’ (*WF*, p. 410). And in the final paragraph of *The Way of All Flesh*, Ernest observes that ‘no man’s opinions [...] can be worth holding unless he knows how to deny them easily and gracefully upon occasion in the cause of charity’ (*WF*, p. 430).

Although Christopher Herbert does not discuss ‘A Clergyman’s Doubts’ as evidence of Butler’s relativism, this correspondence, together with *The Way of All Flesh*, are the clearest indications of Butler’s abjuration of the idea of the existence or the discoverability of an absolute truth or standard of behaviour in his epistemology and code of ethics. However, this relativism is a long way from Matthew Arnold’s anarchic ‘doing as one likes’.<sup>45</sup> Actions are dictated by circumstances and will be judged before a jury comprising ‘the great majority of sensible and successful people’. For all Butler’s subjectivist tendencies, therefore, they are nevertheless bound within the norms of a broader social propriety. It was the laudable desire, conscious or otherwise, to conform to these standards that helped Butler differentiate between self-deception and a more ostensible, but less morally culpable hypocrisy, as I discuss in the following section.

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<sup>45</sup> Matthew Arnold, *Culture and Anarchy*, ed. by Samuel Lipman (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), p. 48.

## Self-deception and agnosticism

The fictional Mrs Grundy, arbiter of societal norms, acted as a Victorian middle-class superego. Butler had established Grundy as the deity worshipped by the respectable Erewhonian Ydgrunites. The High Ydgrunites had been ‘inured from youth to exercises and athletics of all sorts, and liv[ed] fearlessly under the eye of their peers, among whom there exists a high standard of courage, generosity, honour, and every good and manly quality’, and ‘were more like the best class of Englishmen than any whom I have seen in other countries’ (*E*, pp. 157–58, 158). It is this combination of physical and mental health engendered by centuries of good breeding that Butler valued so highly. Those individuals embodying these qualities were best fit to serve on the jury before which one’s actions would be judged. In his discussion of Victorian hypocrisy, Walter Houghton coins the very Butlerian phrase ‘sincere insincerity’ to describe our instinctive, unconscious desire to conform to the norms established by Mrs Grundy (Houghton, p. 399). He writes:

The conservatism of the English temper, its instinctive attachment to custom and tradition, its love of old associations [...] kept many a person repeating the time-honored formulas he had learned in childhood without any clear awareness that in point of fact he no longer believed them (Houghton, p. 397).

However, this outward agreement to views not held inwardly could also have been conscious, but for Houghton, the motives for this conscious hypocrisy were not necessarily ignoble. Churchgoers may, for instance, have repeated creeds they no longer believed in, because they thought the church served a useful social purpose. Conscious hypocrisy could, of course, arise out of selfish motives and could therefore be culpable if the circumstances were not extenuating.

Houghton, however, distinguishes self-deception from these types of hypocrisy. Quoting from Carlyle, self-deception arises when ‘the light of our inner eyesight is gone out’ (Houghton, p. 404). In terms of religious faith, it is the unwillingness to seek out one’s hidden inner belief for fear of unearthing doubt; in Butler’s terms, the unwillingness to examine an issue from all points of view. More recently, Susan Haack has opposed self-deception to intellectual integrity: ‘Intellectual integrity requires a willingness to seek out evidence, and to assess it, honestly’; whilst self-deception involves ‘wilfully pay[ing] attention selectively, concentrating your attention on [...] favorable evidence, and not dwelling on [...] unfavorable information’ (‘The Ideal’, p. 364). This

amounts to the charge of ‘wilful blindness’ that was levelled at Rupert and James Murdoch in the 2012 House of Commons Report into phone-hacking.<sup>46</sup> This recent example illustrates too why Butler believed it to be such an egregious vice. For him, it was a charge he directed solely at professionals, which was used by them, as allegedly in the case of the Murdochs, to protect and promote their own self-interest. The concept was of crucial importance in Butler’s attacks on all forms of cultural authority, and can be found in his earliest writings up to *Erewhon Revisited*. As I go on to show, it also helps explain why he never described himself as an agnostic.

Butler’s engagement with Henry Alford in the *Evidence* pamphlet was his first sustained attack on an authority figure and the first time he charged anyone with self-deception. Reduced to its bare frame, the argument of the pamphlet could be construed merely as an attack by the rationalistic Butler on the orthodox Alford who bases his belief in Christianity, in part, on Matthew’s supernatural account of the Resurrection, which, axiomatically for the rationalist, cannot be true. However, this would be to miss some of the nuances that would become important in Butler’s evolving epistemology, and on his early views regarding professionalization. Butler attacked Alford for his lack of candour, which became such a serious charge in his very public quarrel with Darwin. For Butler, lack of candour was not merely dishonesty, but a lack of intellectual integrity, tantamount to self-deception, an unwillingness to engage in true enquiry. Alford’s self-deception was constituted by his wilful omission of any evidence that contradicted Matthew’s miraculous account of the Resurrection. In other words, whilst he thought himself to be a judge, impartially weighing the evidence from all sides, he was actually acting as a paid advocate.

In *The Fair Haven* John Owen discusses self-deception, although here we must be alert to Butler’s irony, especially as these writings occur in John’s private notebooks. Via this literary device of citing works never intended for publication, Butler is able to use the generic distinction between the public and the private in order to confer an authenticity and veracity of belief on the views expressed. Why should John write anything other than what he truly believed if he did not intend to make it public? By subverting this generic commonplace, Butler introduces the possibility that the views expressed in these private notes may not in fact be as genuinely held as our generic

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<sup>46</sup> ‘News International and Phone-hacking — Culture, Media and Sport Committee’  
 <<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201012/cmselect/cmcumeds/903/90310.htm>>  
 [accessed 9 September 2012].

expectations would lead us to believe, and that John is actually deceiving himself. Discussing the interpretation of the teachings of Christ, John asks whether we shall ‘strip ourselves of preconceived opinion, and come to the question with minds that are truly candid? Whoever shrinks from this is a liar to his own self, and as such, the worst and most dangerous of liars’ (*FH*, p. 42). A little later he writes that ‘we can forgive a man for almost any falsehood provided we feel that he was under strong temptation and well knew that he was deceiving’, but that ‘the common self-deceiver of modern society is a more dangerous and contemptible object than almost any ordinary felon’ (*FH*, p. 43). Given the congruence with Butler’s very serious attacks on Alford and Darwin, we can be sure that John is here voicing Butler’s own views, even if he is at the same time blind to his own self-deception. The distinction John makes between self-deceit and lying under extenuating circumstances was taken up again in ‘A Clergyman’s Doubts’ in which Butler condones the deception of Galileo when he publicly recants his true beliefs in order to save himself from the martyrdom suffered by Giordano Bruno.

‘A Clergyman’s Doubts’ also includes a long letter from ‘Ethics’ which argues that God sanctions lying in the natural world. He cites examples of plovers feigning injury in order to protect their young from predators, and orchids disguising their reproductive organs as flies in order to attract pollinators (*CD*, p. 71). Again, this passage voices Butler’s views regarding the moral expediency of deceit in many circumstances. In his adjudication between the views of the ‘Earnest Clergyman’ and ‘Cantab’, ‘Ethics’ accuses the latter of self-deception:

‘An Earnest Clergyman’ admits that he is in the habit of telling people certain things which he does not believe, but he has no great fancy for deceiving himself; ‘Cantab’ must, I fear, deceive himself before he can tolerate the notion of deceiving other people. (*CD*, p. 70)

Like ‘Cantab’, however, ‘Ethics’ advises the ‘Earnest Clergyman’ not to take his profession too seriously, and to stay where he is. He should ‘say, and do all the Church requires of him — like a gentleman, [...] yet it shall be perfectly plain to all his parishioners who are worth considering, that he is acting as a mouthpiece’ (*CD*, pp. 72–73).

The same point is made in the *The Way of All Flesh* in the sympathetic portrayal of Reverend Hughes, the prison chaplain Ernest meets whilst serving time for sexual assault. The now sceptical Ernest discusses the Christian evidences with him, and the narrator Overton suspects that Hughes does not believe ‘in the actual objective truth of the stories about Christ’s Resurrection and Ascension any more than Ernest did, but

[that] he knew that this was a small matter, and that the real issue lay much deeper than this' (*WF*, p. 308). The important point about Hughes's suspected belief is that he is not guilty of self-deception, even if he may be accused of deceiving his congregation. The implication is that he has studied the Christian evidences from both orthodox and rationalistic points of view, and he is able to accommodate his doubt as to their objective truth with his profession as clergyman.

Butler's final engagement with the idea of self-deception in his theological writings comes in *Erewhon Revisited*. Here it is inflected with contemporary theological controversy just as it was thirty-six years earlier in the *Evidence*, in his assertion of the less-than-honest engagement of Alford with the German biblical critics. In Higgs's summing up of Sunchildism just before he leaves Erewhon for the second time, he distinguishes between the views of Hanky and Panky, Professors of Worldly Wisdom and Unworldly Wisdom respectively; and those of Downie, 'Professor of Logomachy, and perhaps the most subtle dialectician in Erewhon' (*ER*, p. 70). The distinction Higgs makes between Hanky and Panky is similar to that made by 'Ethics' between 'Cantab' and the 'Earnest Clergyman' in 'A Clergyman's Doubts'. Although Hanky is a 'plausible, unscrupulous, heartless scoundrel', the one redeeming feature of 'he and his party' is that

whoever they may deceive, they will not deceive themselves. They believe every one else to be as bad as they are, and see no reason why they should not push their own wares in the way of business. Hanky is everything that we in England rightly or wrongly believe a typical Jesuit to be. (*ER*, p. 227)

In contrast to Hanky, Higgs argues that 'Panky must persuade himself of his own lies, before he is quite comfortable about telling them to other people [...]'. In England Panky would be what we call an extreme ritualist' (*ER*, p. 228). The last years of the nineteenth century saw the most concerted attack on the perceived growth of popery in the Church of England than at any time since the riots over papal aggression in 1850–52 (Chadwick, II, 355). As a Jesuit, Hanky is outside the Church of England; Panky, however, is more dangerous because of his position within it. Hanky is not guilty of deceiving himself as to his Catholicism, whereas Panky, as an 'extreme ritualist', is promoting Catholic practices within the Church, and therefore deceiving himself as to his Protestantism. The danger this was deemed to present is attested by the popular and sensationalist *The Secret History of the Oxford Movement* (1897), written by the anti-ritualist Walter Walsh, which argued that there was a conspiracy within the Church of England to turn it into a popish church (Chadwick, II, 355). Butler's long-standing antipathy to

the Oxford Movement is also reflected in his choice of the pseudonym ‘Oxoniensis’ for the inflexible and dogmatic correspondent who recommends the ‘Earnest Clergyman’ to resign his living and thus consign his family to penury.

Downie is portrayed more sympathetically, although not uncritically, than are Hanky and Panky. He realizes that Sunchildism, despite its having been founded upon the alleged miracle of the balloon ascent of Higgs, has grown to such an extent that its sudden abandonment would be detrimental to Erewhonian society. Higgs explains to Downie what was also Butler’s mature view of Christianity:

Our religion sets before us an ideal which we all cordially accept, but it also tells us of marvels like your chariot and horses, which most of us reject. Our best teachers insist on the ideal, and keep the marvels in the background. (*ER*, pp. 219–20)

Given that the public unmasking of himself as a mere mortal would lead to the collapse of Sunchildism, and with it, perhaps, of the whole of Erewhonian society too, Higgs explains that the pragmatic course to take is not to reveal himself as an unwitting imposter. Rather, the Erewhonian theologians should consider him as an ideal, similar to Butler’s view of the Christ-figure: ‘a peg on which to hang all your own best ethical and spiritual conceptions’ (*ER*, p. 220). He believes that this is the compromise Downie would prefer. However, he fears it likely that the worldly Jesuitical self-promotion of Hanky will prevail. In which case, and in common with the accommodation reached by the ‘Earnest Clergyman’, Downie ‘will neither preach nor write against it, but he will live lukewarmly against it [...]’. In England, Dr. Downie would be a Broad Churchman’ (*ER*, p. 227).

This verdict, I believe, is one that should also be accorded to Butler, and one that terminates his own reconversion narrative, albeit a less complete return to orthodox faith than Larsen’s group of reconverts. His early tendencies to Unitarianism, with its rejection both of miracles and of a belief in the divinity of Christ, are apparent in his *Evidence of the Resurrection*. Eight years later, the publication of *The Fair Haven* was Butler’s own dialectical response to his earlier pamphlet, and illustrates his move away from rationalism. Although it has been read as a satire against orthodox defences of Christianity, I have argued that it is just as much a satire against the unalloyed use of reason as was *Erewhon* a year earlier. Ernest Pontifex in *The Way of All Flesh* also comes to reject a complete reliance on reason as a guide to life, and to realize that for a comfortable life one has to know when to be inconsistent, and when to drop,

temporarily, one's beliefs. Ultimately, this would be achieved by taking the middle way of a lukewarm Broad Churchman. In the preface to *Erewhon Revisited*, Butler writes that:

I have never ceased to profess myself a member of the more advanced wing of the English Broad Church. What those who belong to this wing believe, I believe. What they reject, I reject. No two people think absolutely alike on any subject, but when I converse with advanced Broad Churchmen I find myself in substantial harmony with them. (*ER*, p. xxiv)

In order to understand Butler's religious beliefs, it is important to emphasize his sympathetic portrayal of the clergymen Hughes in *The Way of All Flesh* and Downie in *Erewhon Revisited*, as well as the pragmatic solution chosen by the 'Earnest Clergyman' in 'A Clergyman's Doubts'. All of these, whilst rejecting the supernatural elements of Christianity, are able to remain within their profession for the greater good of society. None of this, however, explains why Butler chose a latitudinarian Broad Church position over agnosticism as both a general epistemology and a particular theological stance. Given that several commentators have described Butler's theology as agnostic, a mistake arising perhaps from his naturalistic rejection of miracles, it is worth examining why this is not the case, and how his antipathy towards self-deception is consistent with his anti-agnosticism.

The only use of the word 'agnosticism' in all of Butler's works occurs in the 1889 essay 'A Medieval Girl School'. It is significant that this reference came when it did, as agnosticism was extremely topical in that year. In 1888, Mary Ward, (Mrs Humphrey Ward), the sister-in-law of Leonard Huxley, son of Thomas, published the hugely successful crisis-of-faith novel *Robert Elsmere*. In the same year, Henry Wace, who later became Dean of Canterbury, had presented a paper on agnosticism at the Church Congress in Manchester. Following the *Oxford English Dictionary*, Wace defined an agnostic as 'one who holds that the existence of anything beyond and behind natural phenomena is unknown, and, so far as can be judged, unknowable, and especially that a First Cause and an unseen world are subjects of which we know nothing'.<sup>47</sup> More importantly, he goes on to locate the source of agnosticism in the scientific method and asserts that it 'claims the scientific merit, or habit, of reserving opinion respecting matters not known or proved'. (p. 6) Wace's paper prompted a response from Thomas Huxley in the form of a long article in the *Nineteenth Century* in February 1889. This was

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<sup>47</sup> 'The Church Congress', *The Times*, 4 October 1888, p. 6.

the first of five articles on agnosticism that appeared in that journal between February and June 1889.<sup>48</sup>

In this first article, Huxley outlines the now well-known circumstances in which he came to coin the term. He was much influenced by Sir William Hamilton's 1829 essay in the *Edinburgh Review* which he incorrectly names as 'On the Philosophy of the Unconditioned', and later he recognized many similarities between this and the Bampton Lectures in 1858 delivered by that 'eminent agnostic' Henry Mansel.<sup>49</sup> In *First Principles* (1862), the agnostic Herbert Spencer attempted to reconcile the claims of science and religion. In the First Part, on 'The Unknowable', he summarizes his aims thus:

Carrying a step further the doctrine put into shape by Hamilton and Mansel; pointing out the various directions in which Science leads to the same conclusions; and showing that in this united belief in an Absolute that transcends not only human knowledge but human conception, lies the only possible reconciliation of Science and Religion.<sup>50</sup>

Mansel's *The Limits of Religious Thought* (1858) was based on his Bampton Lectures of 1858, and his aim was to investigate 'the philosophical problem of the limits of knowledge and the true theory of human ignorance'.<sup>51</sup> More specifically, he asks:

Does there exist in the human mind any direct faculty of religious knowledge, by which, in its speculative exercise, we are able to decide, independently of all external Revelation, what is the true nature of God, and the manner in which He must manifest Himself to the world; and by which, in its critical exercise, we are entitled authoritatively to decide for or against the claims of any professed Revelation, as containing a true or a false representation of the Divine Nature and Attributes? (p. xlvii)

In his attempt to answer this question, Mansel acknowledges the importance of Hamilton's article and of Hamilton's conclusion 'that "the Unconditioned is

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<sup>48</sup> 'Agnosticism', *Nineteenth Century*, February 1889, pp. 169–94. The other articles with Agnosticism in the title that appeared in 1889 were: Frederic Harrison, 'The Future of Agnosticism', *Fortnightly Review*, January 1889, pp. 144–56; W. H. Mallock, "Cowardly Agnosticism", *Fortnightly Review*, April 1889, pp. 529–54; 'Agnosticism', *Westminster Review*, July 1889, pp. 148–56; 'Agnosticism', *Bow Bells*, 1 November 1889, p. 418. In addition, an article by Mary Ward, 'The New Reformation', appeared in the *Nineteenth Century*, March 1889, pp. 454–80.

<sup>49</sup> Hamilton's anonymous essay in which he discusses the Unconditioned is actually entitled 'Cours de Philosophie', and is a review of Victor Cousin's *Course of Philosophy* ('*Cours de Philosophie*', *Edinburgh Review*, October 1829, pp. 194–221.) It was reprinted, with changes, as 'On the Philosophy of the Unconditioned; In Reference to Cousin's Infinito-Absolute', in Sir William Hamilton, *Discussions on Philosophy and Literature, Education and University Reform* (London: Longman, Brown, Green and Longmans, 1852), pp. 1–37; T. H. Huxley, 'Agnosticism', p. 182.

<sup>50</sup> Herbert Spencer, *First Principles*, 2nd edn (London: Williams and Norgate, 1867), p. ix. The 'Unconditioned' and the 'Absolute' tend to be used synonymously. In his 1829 *Edinburgh Review* article, Hamilton defined the unconditioned variously as 'unity, identity, substance, absolute cause, the infinite, pure thought'. See '*Cours de Philosophie*', *Edinburgh Review*, p. 198.

<sup>51</sup> Henry Longueville Mansel, *The Limits of Religious Thought*, 5th edn (London: Murray, 1867), p. xlv.



incognisable and inconceivable” (Mansel, p. xlviii.). We also see how his work engaged with the relationship between natural and revealed religion as had that of Bishop Butler. Indeed, Mansel writes that if Hamilton’s is ‘the best theoretical exposition of the limits of human thought’, the best practical acknowledgement of those limits is to be found in Bishop Butler’s *Analogy of Religion* (pp. xlviii–xlix). Mansel himself was thought of as the new Bishop Butler by Oxford High Churchmen who looked to him to provide a new, intellectually robust apologetics.<sup>52</sup> There thus appears to be a direct, if unlikely, line from Bishop Butler through the High Church Mansel to the self-proclaimed agnostics Huxley and Spencer, which serves to illuminate the connection between Butler’s satirical treatment of the *Analogy of Religion* and his own anti-agnosticism.

In 1879, ten years before his only reference to ‘agnosticism’, Butler published a series of articles under the title ‘God the Known and God the Unknown’ in the *Examiner*, the same journal and the same year in which he published ‘A Clergyman’s Doubts’. During his work on the Gospel accounts of the Resurrection and Crucifixion, Butler became very familiar with the Greek Testament and would have come across the Greek phrase, *Ἀγνοστω Θεῷ*, ‘Agnosto Theo’, or ‘To an unknown God’, in Acts 17. 23. R. H. Hutton relates how Thomas Huxley had coined the neologism ‘agnostic’ in 1869 from the same source.<sup>53</sup> The series of articles was written immediately after the publication of *Evolution, Old and New*, and only two years after *Life and Habit*, and reflects Butler’s engagement with Lamarckism and his theory of inherited memory as much as his theology. In these articles he outlines his own conception of God, and, although he never uses the term ‘agnostic’ or any of its cognates, he does allude to the agnosticism of Huxley and other scientific naturalists when he writes that ‘not even the most prosaic of modern scientists will be inclined to deny the existence of this God’.<sup>54</sup> In line with his theory that we have inherited the memories of our direct lineal ancestors all the way back to the primordial cell, Butler argues that each individual of the whole organic world, animal and vegetable, was part of one vast being, and that ‘it is in this Person that we may see the Body of God — and in the evolution of this Person, the mystery of His Incarnation’; and, moreover, ‘the spirit or soul of this person is the Spirit of God’ (*GK*, pp. 35, 36). For Butler, this was ‘God the Known’. However, just as each of our

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<sup>52</sup> Lightman, *The Origins of Agnosticism*, p. 33.

<sup>53</sup> ‘The Church Congress’, *The Times*, 4 October 1888, p. 6.

<sup>54</sup> ‘God the Known and God the Unknown’, in *Shrewsbury Edition*, ed. by Jones and Bartholomew, XVIII: *Collected Essays*, vol. 1, 1–50 (p. 13). Further references to these essays are given after quotations in the text and prefixed *GK*.

cells is part of our body, and each living thing on Earth is part of one vast being ‘God’, he argues that, by analogy, the myriad of similar Gods in the universe are each part of another greater God, ‘God the Unknown’ (*GK*, pp. 48–49).

For Butler, the orthodox theistic conception of God was nonsensical, and his arguments against it are similar to those used by George Holyoake in his pamphlet attacking Paley (see Chapter 1). Although the theistic God was described as personal, it had no attributes that common sense would expect in a person: ‘A person without flesh and blood, or something analogous, is not a person; we are required, therefore, to believe in a personal God, who has no true person; to believe, that is to say, in an impersonal person’ (*GK*, pp. 24–25). Here, he also appears to be gesturing towards Mansel’s argument in favour of such a conception: ‘We believe *that* the Personal God required by our religious consciousness is also absolute and finite, but we are unable to conceive *how* He is so’ (Mansel, p. xiii).

Instead of this incoherent ‘God of the Theologians’, Butler offers his own simple conception of God — the whole organic world — as something more coherent and comprehensible. He acknowledges that it appears to be similar to the God of the pantheists, whose conception may contain a germ of truth. However, their idea is expressed in such incomprehensible language that it is not worth the effort to unearth it:

With Kant, Schelling, Fichte, and Hegel, we feel that we are with men who have been decoyed into a hopeless quagmire; we understand nothing of their language — we doubt whether they understand themselves, and feel that we can do nothing with them but look at them and pass them by. (*GK*, p. 18)

In contrast, therefore, to the incoherent and incomprehensible conceptions of God offered by theists and pantheists, Butler believes that his idea of God as consisting of the entire organic world should be acceptable to men of science who deny knowledge of any God. For this reason alone it is wrong to label him as agnostic.

Butler’s conception of God derives from his ideas of inherited memory and the continuity of personal identity, and as I have argued, these provide the basis for the privileging of unconscious instinct — ‘the promptings of a kindly disposition’ — over conscious reason in his epistemology (*NB*, p. 338). I have also shown that throughout his works he points out that even mathematics was grounded in unprovable axioms. So, for all the claims of men of science that they reserve judgment on any matter not proved, they are either deceiving themselves or indulging in deliberate dishonesty in order to legitimate their own cultural authority by distinguishing their epistemology from

religious faith. In both instances they are guilty of acting immorally. Butler's anti-agnosticism is therefore grounded in ethics as much as in epistemology. Good breeding via inherited memory and Lamarckian evolution will gradually develop the 'kindly disposition' and good manners of a gentleman in contrast to the sham and cant of the agnostic men of science.

These ideas are summarized succinctly in 'A Medieval Girl School'. He asks himself 'what is the essence of Christianity?', and answers:

Surely common sense and cheerfulness, with unflinching opposition to the charlatanisms and Pharisaisms of a man's own times.<sup>55</sup> The essence of Christianity lies neither in dogma, nor yet in abnormally holy life, but in faith in an unseen world, in doing one's duty, in speaking the truth, in finding the true life rather in others than in oneself, and in the certain hope that he who loses his life on these behalfs finds more than he has lost. What can Agnosticism do against such Christianity as this? I should be shocked if anything I had ever written or shall ever write should seem to make light of these things.<sup>56</sup>

I have dwelt upon the issue of agnosticism as I believe it is crucial to a correct understanding of Butler's thought. To label Butler an agnostic is to misread the evolution of his more mature epistemology, and to ignore how deeply this was inflected by his Lamarckism and his theory of inherited memory. In the following chapter I show how these two theories informed his writings on art, and how his aesthetics formed part of a nexus with his epistemology and his Lamarckism.

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<sup>55</sup> Walter Houghton equates Pharisaism and self-deception in *The Victorian Frame of Mind*, p. 407.

<sup>56</sup> 'A Medieval Girl School (Oropa)', in *Shrewsbury Edition*, ed. by Jones and Bartholomew, XIX: *Collected Essays*, vol. 2, 197–216 (p. 199).



Figure 1: *Sacro monte* at Varese, showing the pilgrims' path, one of the chapels, and the monastery at the summit.

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## Chapter 4

### Butler's Lamarckian Aesthetics

In Chapter 2, it was demonstrated that the newly professionalized men of science scorned Butler's intervention into evolutionary debates, primarily because he was not a practising scientist, and thereby lacked the necessary authority. In his biblical criticism, his first anonymous publication, *The Evidence for the Resurrection*, was ignored; whilst his second, the pseudonymous *Fair Haven*, was dismissed when, in the preface to the second edition, he disclosed his identity as the author and admitted his motive. However, as an art critic, Butler was genuinely qualified. He was a moderately successful artist in his own right, having had paintings exhibited at the Royal Academy Summer Exhibitions in 1869, 1871, 1874, and 1876.<sup>1</sup> More importantly, he applied, albeit unsuccessfully, for the position of Slade Professor of Fine Art at the University of Cambridge in 1886, which was awarded to archaeologist and art historian John Middleton (Jones, *Memoir*, II, 33).

The importance that Butler ascribed to his writings on art is highlighted by the assessment he made towards the end of his life of his main achievements, five of which are: 'The restitution to Giovanni and Gentile Bellini of their portraits in the Louvre and the finding of five other portraits of these two painters of whom Crowe and Cavalcaselle and Layard maintain that we have no portrait'; 'the restoration to Holbein of the drawing in the Basle Museum called "La Danse"'; 'the calling attention to Gaudenzio Ferrari and putting him before the public with something like the emphasis that he deserves'; 'the discovery of a life-sized statue of Leonardo da Vinci by Gaudenzio Ferrari'; and 'the unearthing of the Flemish sculptor Jean de Wespign (called Tabacchetti in Italy) and of Giovanni Antonio Paracca' (*NB*, pp. 383–84). 'Restitution', 'restoration', 'calling attention', 'discovery', 'unearthing': all these words attest to Butler's obsession with giving belated posthumous recognition to those long-dead artists who have been air-brushed out of history by a professional art establishment whose self-interest was not served by promoting them. Moreover, this list of achievements demonstrates that correct attribution was absolutely fundamental to Butler's aesthetics since the character of the artist was inseparable from the quality of the work.

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<sup>1</sup> Elinor Shaffer, *Erewhons of the Eye: Samuel Butler as Painter, Photographer and Art Critic* (London: Reaktion, 1988), p. 33.

Butler's two main works on art are *Alps and Sanctuaries* (1881), and *Ex Voto* (1888). In both, Butler discusses what he believed to be the neglected fifteenth- and sixteenth-century art of Lombardy and Piedmont. *Alps and Sanctuaries* is as much an impressionistic travel guide as it is a work of art criticism. *Ex Voto*, in contrast, is primarily a work of art criticism. Both works, however, are concerned with the art of the various *sacri monti* to be found in the isolated valleys of Lombardy and Piedmont (see Fig. 1, p. 135). These *sacri monti* are mountainsides upon which a path guides the pilgrim past a series of chapels, in each of which are life-sized sculptures and frescoes that illustrate a particular biblical episode. On the *sacro monte* at Varallo, for instance, there are forty-three chapels largely depicting scenes from the life of Christ. Butler was peculiarly attracted to these neglected spaces, and in his writings he sought to recuperate the reputations of two of the main artists, Gaudenzio Ferrari (1475/80–1546) and Tabachetti (c.1569–1615), responsible for the frescoes and sculpture at Varallo, the first and largest of the *sacri monti*.

Clarice Zdanski has rightly noted that the 'central issue' of *Alps and Sanctuaries* is 'Butler's concept of the history of Italian painting and its alleged "decline"'.<sup>2</sup> In fact, at the centre of the book is the important chapter 'Considerations on the Decline of Italian Art', which lays out Butler's aesthetic manifesto, and in which he attacks the academy as both a mode of teaching the techniques of art, and as the custodian and arbiter of aesthetic values. For Zdanski, the *sacri monti* 'provided [Butler] with an anti-academic model for a parallel type of art history that might repudiate the common fixation on periodization, along with its chronological and hierarchical approach to the arts' (p. 227). In this chapter I argue that Butler's anti-academicism was not merely another example of his contestation of all forms of cultural authority. Rather, I demonstrate that the germs of his aesthetics and anti-academicism can be found in his evolutionary writings, particularly in *Life and Habit*. Aesthetics was, of course, an important focus for evolutionary and psychological theorists from the 1850s onwards, so Butler was certainly not alone in making this connection. I situate Butler within this field in the first section of the chapter, and claim that his various writings on art constitute a Lamarckian aesthetics, which emphasizes the central role of desire in the evolution of the individual artist. This draws heavily upon the Lamarckian idea of use or 'doing' as the means of artistic development, rather than, in Butler's phrase, of 'learning to do', as well as upon his own theory of inherited memory. In the second section, I show how one

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<sup>2</sup> Clarice Zdanski, 'Samuel Butler, Local Identity, and the Periodizing of Northern Italian Art: The Travel Writer-Painter's View of Art History', in *Victorian Against the Grain*, ed. by Paradis, pp. 223–50 (p. 224).

of the consequences of his aesthetics, that of continuous improvement, is used to construct his idea of artistic genius, as exhibited by his favourite Renaissance artists, Giovanni Bellini, Ferrari, and Tabachetti. These are contrasted with Raphael, Leonardo da Vinci, and Michelangelo, whom he believed to be the over-rated masters of the High Renaissance. Finally, I demonstrate that his aesthetic ideas were used to offer an alternative to the ‘sham art’ of the latter half of the nineteenth century, particularly that of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood (PRB). His critique of the PRB is compared with that of Max Nordau, and I argue that Butler’s aesthetics offers an optimistic alternative to the discourse of degeneration, as exemplified by Nordau, at the fin de siècle. Within his aesthetics, good art assumes a sacramental quality, being the visible manifestation of the inward and spiritual grace of its creator. Art, therefore, is crucial in any consideration of Butler, as it functions as an exemplary space in which one can view his evolutionary ideas in operation.

### **The Lamarckian origins of Butler’s aesthetics**

In my introduction I outlined the connection Butler makes in *Life and Habit* between his aesthetic and epistemological theories: ‘beauty is but knowledge perfected and incarnate’ (*LH*, p. 32); and for him, the most perfect knowledge is instinctive, intuitive, that of which we are unconscious. The chapter in which this quotation appears is primarily concerned with highlighting the opposition between the imperfect conscious knowledge of ‘men of science’, and the unconscious, and hence perfect, knowledge of some ostensibly ‘ignorant, uncultured men’ (*LH*, p. 28). But in the context of the chapter, ‘science’ for Butler includes ‘music, art, literature, or theology’, all of which are ‘more or less parts of science’ (*LH*, p. 30). Butler’s inclusion of artistic knowledge within his capacious category of ‘science’ allows us to infer, from what is primarily an evolutionary work, those characteristics that constitute his ideal artist. Just as the intuition of the local ‘observant workman’ may offer better geological knowledge of a particular locale than the reasoning of a qualified mining engineer, by analogy, the untrained artist is capable of producing better art, in Butler’s aesthetics, than one who has been academically trained (*LH*, p. 28). Knowledge acquired consciously by one’s ancestors is inherited in Lamarckian fashion, and over many generations it becomes unconscious and instinctive, as it becomes for the local workman whose geological knowledge is inherited from generations of ancestors who lived and worked in the same area.



The distinction Butler makes between conscious and unconscious knowledge is important, because he then goes on to equate the conscious acquisition of knowledge via a formal programme of study with moral and physical degeneracy: 'The man who devotes himself to science [...] occupies a lower place, both scientifically and morally, for it is not possible but that his drudgery should somewhat soil him both in mind and health of body' (*LH*, p. 30). In contrast, his ideal exemplars, 'uncultured men', 'have good health, good looks, good temper, common sense, and energy, and they hold all these good things in such perfection as to be altogether without introspection' (*LH*, p. 27). It is such people who produce, for Butler, genuine rather than sham art. When one remembers that Butler is using the term 'science' in a very wide sense to include artistic knowledge too, one can understand why he believed that the decline of Italian art corresponded with the growth in influence of Annibale Carracci's Academy. It also explains why Butler was scornful of the so-called cultivated eye of well-known professional art critics such as Sir Henry Layard, a man of science, in his wider sense. In order to appreciate correctly the neglected fifteenth- and sixteenth-century art of the *sacri monti*, it was necessary for the nineteenth-century observer to unlearn or forget such highly developed, cultivated ideas, and to employ a new way of seeing, with what Elinor Shaffer has termed the 'ignorant eye' (*Erewhons of the Eye*, p. 105).

In his evolutionary works, Butler makes an analogy between the development of organs, such as the eye, and the development of tools or machines. The inventor of the lens had no idea that it may evolve into a complex telescope at some distant future time. They were concerned merely with satisfying a present need. Similarly, Butler argues, it is inconceivable that the amoeba, 'which is probably just sensitive to light [...] should be able to form a conception of an eye and set itself to work to grow one' (*EON*, p. 38). Like the telescope the eye has evolved by small incremental steps, each satisfying an immediate need of the organism. In Butler's Lamarckian scheme, evolution thus proceeds by this constant interplay between the perception that one has a power, however small, and the sense that this power can satisfy a need: '[Animals and plants] have travelled as man has travelled, with but little perception of a want till there was also some perception of a power, and with but little perception of a power till there was a dim sense of a want' (*EON*, p. 39). The power and desire thus mutually reinforce each other and are inherited by one's progeny. He puts this idea most succinctly in *Luck, or Cunning?*:



The point at issue is this; — whether luck or cunning is the fitter to be insisted on as the main means of organic development. Erasmus Darwin and Lamarck answered this question in favour of cunning. They settled it in favour of intelligent perception of the situation [...] and persistent effort to turn it to account. (*LC*, p. 54)

Butler's ideal artists develop in a similar manner. They have a desire to paint a subject that holds genuine interest for them, and perceive a rudimentary skill that will enable them to do so. Their skill thus increases, which in turn widens the range of subjects they are able to represent. They paint because they enjoy it, rather than because they are acting under the instructions of a patron; they do as they like, rather than adhering to academic rules; and they paint for immediate pleasure rather than for achieving some distant fame. C. E. M. Joad and Thomas Jeffers have described this strand of Butler's thought as, respectively, his epicureanism and his hedonics, although neither has identified a relationship with his aesthetics.<sup>3</sup> It is, however, central to Butler's theory of all instances of development, aesthetic or otherwise. It results in the continuous improvement over one's life, in terms of both moral qualities and technical skill. The qualities and skills acquired go on to form part of the inherited memory of one's offspring.

Butler's aesthetic epicureanism is reminiscent of John Ruskin's free Gothic labourers in 'The Nature of Gothic' but without Ruskin's social mission.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, Butler's theory offers a diametrically opposite solution to the problem Matthew Arnold addresses in *Culture and Anarchy* (1867). Culture, in one of Arnold's various formulations, was 'a pursuit of our total perfection by means of getting to know [...] the best which has been thought and said in the world' (*Culture and Anarchy*, p. 5). Anarchy, or 'doing as one likes', was a potential consequence of both the extension of the franchise in the 1867 Reform Act and the loss of authority of revealed religion. Culture was Arnold's antidote and alternative secular authority. Butler's problem was to find an alternative to the sham cultural authority that had been appropriated by self-serving professional cliques, be they within the established Church, science, or the arts. The solution is to be found in his hedonics, which harmonize Arnold's opposition between culture and anarchy: the perfection of culture is to be found in the anarchy of doing what one likes. Butler's epicurean pleasure-seeking is the means by which incremental improvements are

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<sup>3</sup> C. E. M. Joad, *Samuel Butler* (London: Parsons, 1924), pp. 145–50; Jeffers, pp. 47–70.

<sup>4</sup> See, for instance, John Ruskin, *On the Nature of Gothic Architecture* (London: Smith, Elder, 1854), p. 18.

accumulated and take one towards perfection, even if, as I discuss below, such a telos is beyond reach, or, at best, ephemeral.

These ideas are dramatized in *The Way of All Flesh*. In my introduction I assert that this work is not just a *Bildungsroman*, but that it is the portrait of the artist — Butler's alter ego, Ernest Pontifex — as a young man, and is therefore, more specifically, a *Künstlerroman*. Read thus, it serves to illustrate not just Butler's reflections upon his younger self, but also his own growth as a writer. There is a point in Ernest's development at which, on the strength of a controversial essay questioning the literary merit of the Psalms, he acquires a reputation that he endeavours to maintain. For Butler, this is the sort of impure motive that characterizes the professions, and which does not lead to further artistic improvement. The narrator, Overton, highlights just how misguided Ernest's effort is:

He did not understand that if he waited and listened and observed, another idea of some kind would probably occur to him some day, and that the development of this would in its turn suggest still further ones. He did not yet know that the very worst way of getting hold of ideas is to go hunting expressly after them. The way to get them is to study something of which one is fond, and to note down whatever crosses one's mind in reference to it, either during study or relaxation, in a little notebook kept always in the waistcoat pocket. Ernest has come to know all about this now, but it took him a long time to find it out, for this is not the kind of thing that is taught at schools and universities. (*WF*, p. 229)

I show below that Butler believed that such a practice results in the continuous improvement over the life of the artist, as exemplified by Giovanni Bellini, in contrast with the decline of an artist such as Raphael. The method recommended to Ernest is also Butler's own, as his voluminous aphoristic notebooks attest.

These ideas concerning artistic improvement, introduced as illustrations and analogies in his evolutionary works, are developed further in his works on art criticism. In the important chapter in *Alps and Sanctuaries* in which he discusses the decline of Italian art, he asserts that modern Italian pictures are shams, 'painted not from love of this particular subject and an irresistible desire to paint it, but from a wish to paint an academy picture, and win money or applause'.<sup>5</sup> Similarly, he explains why modern English artists are proficient in some genres, but not in others:

We generally succeed with sporting or quasi-sporting subjects [...]. We like these things: therefore we observe them; therefore we soon become able to

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<sup>5</sup> *Shrewsbury Edition*, ed. by Jones and Bartholomew, VII: *Alps and Sanctuaries*, 121. Further references to this volume are given after quotations in the text and prefixed *AS*.

express them. Historical and costume pictures we have no genuine love for; we do not, therefore, go beyond repeating commonplaces concerning them. (AS, p. 138)

Sincerity of motive is thereby central to Butler's aesthetics. He spells this out explicitly in the introduction to *Ex Voto*, in which he lays out the terms of the debate in his repudiation of the views of Sir Henry Layard, the respected art critic and director of the National Gallery, who had edited the latest edition of the popular *Kügler's Handbook of Painting* (1887). In *Ex Voto*, Layard stands as a representative of the art establishment just as Darwin had represented the scientific establishment, and Dean Alford the Church, an authority figure whose pronouncements served to maintain his own professional position. Layard had written that 'one thing prominently taught us by the works of Leonardo and Raffaele, of Michael Angelo and Titian, is distinctly this — that purity of morals, freedom of institutions, and sincerity of faith have nothing to do with excellence in art'.<sup>6</sup> For Butler, this is 'as fundamentally unsound [a sentence] as any I ever saw written, even by a professional art critic or by a director of a national collection' (EV, p. 5). The work of no artist 'will live permanently in our affections', Butler writes, 'unless it is rooted in sincerity of faith and in love towards God and man' (EV, p. 6). The three criteria Layard deemed irrelevant to the creation of excellent art recur as positive markers throughout Butler's works.

Layard severs the link between the moral character of the artist and the quality of their art; in contrast, Butler cannot judge the art in the absence of the artist. The moral qualities or otherwise of the artist are expressed in the work of art itself, and in his discussions of art he privileges the feeling elicited by the work over the technical skill, acquired by an academic training, with which it was executed, as I go on to demonstrate. This explains Butler's almost obsessive need to attribute the true artist to the artwork. He describes how his judgment of a work's aesthetic qualities depends on what he knows of the artist's biography and genealogy:

I know that in the matter of books, painting, and music I constantly find myself unable to form a settled opinion till I have [...] made myself acquainted with details about a man's antecedents and ways of life which are generally held to be irrelevant. (NB, p. 187)

This may seem surprising in the light of Butler's veneration of the works of Homer and Shakespeare, two poets about whom we still know very little. However, the quality of

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<sup>6</sup> Cited in *Shrewsbury Edition*, ed. by Jones and Bartholomew, IX: *Ex Voto*, 5. Further references to this volume are given after quotations in the text and prefixed EV.

their work rendered it inconceivable to Butler that they were anything other than well-bred people. Indeed, he goes on to argue that ‘we want no one to give us any clues to the nature of such men as Giovanni Bellini’ (*NB*, p. 187). In the next chapter I show how, through meticulously close readings, Butler reconstructed the biography and personality of Shakespeare and inferred the authorship of the *Odyssey*.

But negative moral qualities can be inherited just as readily as the positive markers to be found in his ideal artist. Butler had accused Darwin of ‘hoodwinking the public’ (see Chapter 2), and in a notebook entry he observes that:

If a painter has not tried hard to paint well and has tried hard to hoodwink the public, his offspring is not likely to show hereditary aptitude for painting, but is likely to have an improved power of hoodwinking the public. (*NB*, p. 161)

This is probably Butler’s most direct assertion that both artistic skill and moral qualities, acquired in one’s lifetime as a result of a Lamarckian desire-driven effort, are capable of being inherited by one’s offspring.

The evolution of both morality and an aesthetic sensibility was topical in the 1870s with various theories set out in Darwin’s *The Descent of Man* (1871), St George Mivart’s *On the Genesis of Species* (1871), Grant Allen’s *Physiological Aesthetics* (1877), and Butler’s *Life and Habit*. Darwin presents evidence that birds are able to appreciate beauty, and observes that ‘judging from the hideous ornaments, and the equally hideous music admired by most savages, it might be argued that their aesthetic faculty was not so highly developed [...] as in birds’.<sup>7</sup> In the second edition of *Genesis of Species*, published just after *The Descent of Man*, Mivart argues that human morality could not have evolved from the baser instincts of pleasure and pain in lower animals, accusing Darwin of ‘confound[ing] our moral judgments with the gregarious instincts of beasts’ (p. 211). Unlike the devoutly Catholic Mivart, for whom it was imperative to sever this evolutionary link between elevated human morals and bestial instinct, Grant Allen attempts ‘to show the general relation of pleasure and pain to our organism and its circumstances’, and ‘that our existing likes and dislikes in aesthetic matters are the necessary result of natural selection’.<sup>8</sup> If so, the aesthetic sensibility has a physical basis

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<sup>7</sup> Charles Darwin, *The Descent of Man, and Selection in Relation to Sex*, intr. by James Moore and Adrian Desmond (London: Penguin, 2004), pp. 461–65, 116.

<sup>8</sup> Grant Allen, *Physiological Aesthetics* (London: King, 1877), pp. vii–viii.

rather than being grounded in higher mental faculties, and is not, therefore, unique to humans.<sup>9</sup>

Butler's idea of the evolution of an aesthetic sense differs from both Mivart and Allen. Unlike Mivart, he believes that 'all that is highest and most beautiful in the soul, as well as in the body, could be, and has been, developed from beings lower than man' (*LH*, p. 237). However, although Butler does not specifically mention Allen's book, which was published about a year before *Life and Habit*, he casts doubt on the ability of natural selection to effect any aesthetic sensibility, arguing instead that his Lamarckian theory can be applied to moral, and by extension, aesthetic qualities.<sup>10</sup> Mivart and Allen both worked within a Darwinian framework to describe how a sophisticated human aesthetic sensibility could or could not evolve from simple bestial instinct. Butler's Lamarckian aesthetics was, however, critical and evaluative as well as descriptive. At stake was the link between the morality of the artist and the quality of their work, and his aesthetic theory had to preserve this. Butler sought to show the qualitative differences between the evolutionary paths of good art (or artists) and sham art.

Within human civilization itself, he applies his theory of the evolution of morals to account for what he believes to be the generally higher standard of good manners in Italians than in the English, and ascribes it to their centuries of good breeding:

This is not to be wondered at, for the Italians have had a civilization for now some three or four thousand years, whereas all other nations are, comparatively speaking, new countries [...]. The longer civilization has existed in any country the more trustworthy and agreeable will its inhabitants be. (*AS*, p. 103)

Because the morality of the artist is, for Butler, expressed in the artwork, and because he considers Italians generally speaking to have a higher ethical standard than other nations, it is not surprising that he should consider Italian art amongst the best. However, the Valsesians in particular, of which Ferrari was one, also exhibit the benefits of crossing due to their liminal position on the northern border of Italy: 'They have ever been [...] a vigorous, sturdy, independent race, imbued, in virtue perhaps of their mixed descent, with a large share of the good points both of Southern and Northern nations'

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<sup>9</sup> Jonathan Smith, *Charles Darwin and Victorian Visual Culture*, Cambridge Studies in Nineteenth-Century Literature and Culture, 50 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp. 164–65.

<sup>10</sup> *LH*, p. 237. Butler refers to *The Descent of Man* extremely rarely in his writings, and he may be confusing natural selection with the sexual selection that Darwin proposes as an explanation for the evolution of mental characteristics, such as the appreciation of beauty.

(*EV*, p. 39). And he would later attribute the excellence of Tabachetti's work to the fact that he was of Flemish descent, but working in Italy.

Obviously, however, such a general tendency to a high standard of morality, and therefore to excellence in art, does not preclude the fact that some Italian artists were rated more highly than others by Butler, and, within his evolutionary schema, one of the explanations posited is the tainting of some artists by the moral degeneracy of the academy. As noted above, Butler associated insincerity with academicism, which is entirely consistent with the self-serving motives he attributed to the professional men of science and the clergy. The opposition Butler describes between sincerity and academicism was common at the time. In 1880, a work by Annibale Carracci (1560–1609), commonly viewed as the founder of the first sixteenth-century academy, is described as having 'much energy [...] but the inspiration of the whole is of the insincere order which marked the decline of art into academicism'.<sup>11</sup> In an article of 1893, two nineteenth-century French painters, the naturalistic Pascal Dagnan-Bouveret (1852–1929) and the academic and formulaic Adolphe Bouguereau (1825–1905) are contrasted as being at 'the extremes of sincerity and academicism'.<sup>12</sup> However, sincerity here is used in a different context to how Butler understands it. The naturalistic Dagnan-Bouveret is described as sincere because of his almost photographic realism. His sincerity is therefore a function of technical skill. Butler, in contrast, uses the term to describe the purity and authenticity of motive. This difference is important in his critique of the PRB, to which I shall return.

Butler's anti-academicism derives, therefore, from the opposition he makes between sincerity of motive and technical skill. In *The Fair Haven*, published years before his main writings on art, he notes the technical imperfections of Giovanni Bellini, one of his favourite *quattrocento* artists. He writes that Bellini's hand 'was less dexterous than his intention [was] pure', and that he had an incapacity 'to utter perfectly the perfect thought which was within' (*FH*, pp. 216, 217). Although the academy may teach technique, it cannot imbue the artist with the moral quality of sincerity. Even prior to this, in 'Instead of an Article on the Dudley Exhibition', one of a series of articles he wrote for *The Drawing-Room Gazette* in 1871, Butler discusses the process by which an observer can decide if they like a work of art. The first question to be asked

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<sup>11</sup> 'The Private Collections of England: Nostel Priory, Wakefield', *Athenaeum*, 18 September 1880, pp. 374–76 (p. 375).

<sup>12</sup> 'Art Chronicle', *Portfolio*, 24 (1893), i–xxvi (p. xxvi).

is whether the idea which the painter had in his head was one which it was desirable or not that he should attempt to communicate pictorially to another [...]. It is not the picture *per se* that is valuable or the reverse, it is that which the painter by means of his picture makes us feel that *he* felt: this is the soul of the picture which may inhabit and glorify a very humble body [...]. Are all the figures upon this so much praised canvas found upon reflection to be nothing but an academic arrangement of objects, quickened neither by thought nor (other than technical) excellence [...]? The essence of a painting is the feeling with which it was painted; just as the essence of a sentence is not its grammar and structure, but the thought which it was intended to convey.<sup>13</sup>

He goes on to bemoan the privileged position accorded to technical excellence by art critics: ‘the misfortune is that good workmanship which is, after all, only a secondary quality (though a great one), should be held to be the end-all and be-all of painting’ (p. 249). For all the ‘marvellous gifts’ of the three High Renaissance masters — Raphael, Leonardo da Vinci, and Michelangelo — it is their ‘self-seeking’ motives and ‘insincerity’ that prevent Butler from deriving permanent pleasure from their work. Technical mastery will not ‘make any man’s work live permanently in our affections unless it is rooted in sincerity of faith and in love towards God and man’ (*EV*, p. 6). In contrast, the work of Ferrari and Tabachetti has been created ‘with sincerity and freedom from affectation’ (*EV*, p. 6).

These noble motives imputed to the work of Ferrari and Tabachetti, are, I believe, implicit in the formal qualities of the *sacro monte* itself. The ‘freedom from institutions’, which Butler deems necessary for excellence in art, is absent from the work of Raphael and Michelangelo since much of their most celebrated art was at the behest of various sixteenth-century Popes. In contrast, the *sacri monti*, and particularly Varallo, which was the first, were established for motives far removed from papal aggrandizement. The form of the *sacro monte* was conceived in order

to bring the scene as vividly as possible before people who have not had the opportunity of being able to realize it to themselves through travel or general cultivation of the imaginative faculties. How can an Italian peasant realize to himself the notion of the Annunciation so well as by seeing such a chapel as that at Varese? (*AS*, pp. 225–26)

Of course, Butler was not alone in privileging the sincerity of spiritual feeling over technical excellence in his aesthetics. Alexis-François Rio, in *De la poésie chrétienne* (1836; translated into English as *The Poetry of Christian Art* in 1854) had distinguished technical

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<sup>13</sup> ‘Instead of an Article on the Dudley Exhibition’, in *Shrewsbury Edition*, ed. by Jones and Bartholomew, I: *A First Year in Canterbury Settlement*, 246–50 (pp. 248–49).

skill from the sincerity of spiritual feeling, the latter being his principal criterion of artistic worth.<sup>14</sup> Lord Lindsay, too, in his *Sketches of the History of Christian Art* (1847), argues that Christian artists are distinguished from the pagan Phidias and Praxiteles by their command of ‘the highest element of truth and beauty, the Spiritual’:

It is not [...] symmetry of Form or beauty of Colouring [...] that is required of us and that constitutes our prerogative, but the conception by the artist and expression to the spectator of the highest and holiest spiritual truths and emotions.<sup>15</sup>

John Ruskin is perhaps the best-known proponent of this view, and Rio and Lindsay are two of the very few contemporary writers on art to whom he refers, albeit fleetingly, in *Modern Painters* (1843–60). I go on to examine how Butler’s aesthetics differ from Ruskin’s, and particularly from the Ruskin-inspired PRB in the last section of this chapter.

However, it is neither a painting nor a sculpture that best illustrates Butler’s Lamarckian aesthetics. Rather, it is the porch outside the church at Rossura in the Ticino canton of Switzerland, close to the Italian border, and one of Butler’s favourite sketching places. For him, the porch was ‘absolutely without ornament’, and he contrasts it with a new mausoleum that had been constructed near Angera, on Lake Maggiore (AS, p. 33). He took Festing Jones there on one of his annual visits to Northern Italy in 1878, but Jones was blind to its aesthetic qualities (Jones, *Memoir*, I, 285). Jones admired the mausoleum instead, which was ‘bristling with architectural features’. Butler, of course, disagreed, and Jones recounts their conversation:

[Butler] said it was all *γνωσις* [gnosis] and no *αγαπη* [agape]. I said that an artist must master his technique before he could express what he wished to say. But it seemed that by devoting his energies to gaining this power he would lose the desire to say anything; and then would come the temptation, which generally proved too strong, to glory in merely displaying the ability he had acquired. (*Memoir*, I, 282)

In this context, for Butler, ‘*αγαπη*’ is the feeling that inspires the work — the sincerity of motive — that thus inheres within it; ‘*γνωσις*’ on the other hand, is the technical skill with which the work is executed. Sham artists may be good technicians but they have little genuine feeling for their subject. Jones goes on to recount how Butler likened him to Darwin,

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<sup>14</sup> Hilary Fraser, *The Victorians and Renaissance Italy* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), pp. 97–98; R. W. Lightbown, ‘Rio, Alexis-François’, in *Oxford Art Online* <<http://0-www.oxfordartonline.com.catalogue.ulrls.lon.ac.uk/subscriber/article/grove/art/T072230>> [accessed 13 September 2012].

<sup>15</sup> Lord Lindsay, *Sketches of the History of Christian Art*, 3 vols (London: Murray, 1847), I, p. xv.



who could see no design in the organic kingdom, and thought it all rested on accident. There could be no doubt that the architect had made the porch, and made it as he wanted it to be; [...] he had avoided all the crimes and flaunting affectation of the swaggering architect of the mausoleum [...]. The impression that the porch could not be otherwise, that feeling of inevitableness, was just one of its charms [...]. Unlike the mausoleum, it was all *αγαπη* and only as much *γνωσις* as was necessary; it was a background for Giovanni Bellini, not for Michael Angelo. (*Memoir*, I, 285)

‘Flaunting’, ‘affectation’, and ‘swaggering’ are words used by Butler that betray the insincerity of the motives, and therefore the moral degeneracy of the creator of the mausoleum. They are markers of a wish, not to please oneself, but to pander to currently fashionable taste, and to gain temporary fame at the expense of a more permanent reputation, what Butler often described as living a life in others.

A final aspect of Butler’s aesthetics relates to the nature of the technical training the academy provided. One of his general principles was that one must examine any problem through one’s own eyes, rather than through the eyes of previous authorities: the Unitarian Lant Carpenter’s exhortation to ‘examine for yourself’. The problem with an academic training, as for any other professional study, was that it did just the opposite. Rather than training one to use one’s own eyes when painting a landscape, for instance, and to select the most significant features, it taught one to adopt those classical conventions that were deemed to be the most aesthetically desirable. Moreover, the young painter in the academy would most likely be forced to study the more mature work of their classical exemplars. They will therefore be taught to see nature through the eyes of old men ‘without going through the embryonic stages’ (*AS*, p. 127). This would be an important feature of the critique of the art of Butler’s own day, and of the means by which he proposed to rejuvenate it.

These ideas are given an evolutionary explanation in *Life and Habit*. Butler makes an analogy between our assimilation of new ideas, and the crossing of animals or plants. A fertile cross only occurs if the two parents are biologically close. Similarly, we can only assimilate new ideas if they are only slightly different from those we already hold:

If any one gives us a new idea which is not too far ahead of us, such an idea is often of great service to us, and may give new life to our work [...]; if, on the other hand, they are too new, and too little led up to, so that we find them too strange and hard to be able to understand [...], they put us out, [...] rendering us incapable of even trying to do our work at all, from pure despair of succeeding. (*LH*, p. 135)

Compare this with the process by which Butler believes artists become great, in the conclusion to *Life and Habit*:

So the greatest musicians, painters, and poets owe their greatness rather to their fusion and assimilation of all the good that has been done up to, and *especially near about, their own time*, than to any very startling steps they have taken in advance. (*LH*, p. 248, emphasis added)

Such an idea is akin to that discussed above in which it was posited that a distant motive, such as a desire for wealth, rather than the more proximate motive of a genuine love of the subject, would result only in the production of sham art. By seeing nature through the eyes of an old man, without going through the intermediate stages, the young academy student is thus forced to take ‘startling steps’, rather than attending to their immediate desires. As a result they find these ideas strange and hard to assimilate, find the work difficult, do not enjoy it, and will therefore not progress. Butler advocates that beginners in painting should help each other rather than seek help from older professionals: ‘Professional men [...] know too much for the beginner to be *en rapport* with them [...]. The beginner can understand the beginner, but the cross between him and the proficient performer is too wide for fertility’ (*AS*, p. 136).

Butler used the biological metaphor of crossing frequently in his writings. It is important in terms of his Lamarckian thought as it is often used to illustrate how ideas or moral qualities can be acquired by an organism that are absent from their direct lineal ancestors. It is therefore used as a means of transcending the biological determinism of one’s bloodline, that is, as a form of artificial rather than natural selection. In the current context Butler uses it to show how young painters are able to acquire technical ability by imitating the work of their peers. He goes on to suggest that if a beginner were to view any works of great painters, they would do best to view their early, rather than their more mature art, ‘for it would show him that he need not worry himself because his work does not look clever’ (*AS*, pp. 136–37). This idea of the development of individual artists over their lifetimes plays a central role in Butler’s writings on art, and is one of the major consequences arising from his Lamarckian aesthetics.

## Continuous improvement and genius

In Chapter 3 I argued that Ernest's epistemological development in *The Way of All Flesh* was a recapitulation of the evolution of human civilization. Similarly, the development of the individual artist can be read as the ontogenic recapitulation of an idealized model of the development of art. For Butler, one of the hallmarks of his favourite artists and writers was the continuous improvement over their lifetimes. An examination of these artists could therefore provide Butler with a remedy for what he believed to be the decline of art in his own day. This concept of continuous improvement may be the motivation behind his explanation, in the preface to *Evolution, Old and New* of why he included an Opus number on the title page of each of his works (*EON*, pp. xv–xvi). If all writers and painters included these, he argues, it would help in understanding their works: 'No work can be judged intelligently unless not only the author's relation to his surroundings, but also the relation in which the work stands to the life and other works of the author, is understood and borne in mind' (*EON*, p. xv). Such a chronological numbering system is the most convenient method of relating this.

In *Alps and Sanctuaries*, he discusses the novels of Benjamin Disraeli, one of his favourite novelists, and writes that

the growth observable throughout Lord Beaconsfield's life was continued to the end. He was one of those who, no matter how long he lived, would have been always growing; this is what makes his later novels so much better than those of Thackeray or Dickens. (p. 182)

Earlier in the book he describes Disraeli as a 'thorough Erasmus Darwinian' for a line in Disraeli's *Endymion* (1880) that he quotes: "'There is nothing like will; everybody can do exactly what they like in this world, provided they really like it. Sometimes they think they do, but in general it's a mistake'" (*AS*, p. 7). As argued above, it is this Lamarckian desire to 'do exactly what they like', rather than conforming to academic conventions, which leads to continuous improvement. Butler felt that the 'drudgery' of having to conform to an academic education would 'soil [the student] both in mind and health of body' (*LH*, p. 30). By contrast, doing what gives one pleasure would result in physical and mental health.

Within the visual arts, Butler had a great admiration for the paintings of Giovanni Bellini, noting that his work seemed to improve as he matured (*EV*, p. 122). The art critic Alexis-François Rio, too, several decades earlier than Butler, had observed

that ‘perhaps no artist ever made such surprising and continued progress, from the commencement to the close of his career, as Giovanni Bellini’.<sup>16</sup> Butler contrasts the continuous improvement of Bellini with the alleged decline in the quality of Raphael’s work, an artist for whom he had little admiration. In his discussion of Raphael’s *Ansidei* altarpiece, purchased by the National Gallery in 1885, Butler notes that although it is a relatively early work (it was painted in 1505), ‘the drawing [...] is not that of one who is going to do better by and by, it is that of one who is essentially insincere and who will never aim higher than immediate success’.<sup>17</sup> In contrast to those like Raphael, whose mercenary motives and insincerity condemn them to an artistic trajectory of mediocre stagnation or decline, those artists who begin modestly, and practise their art constantly because of their sincere desire to paint, will grow as artists (*NB*, p. 146).

Butler uses this notion of continuous progress to illustrate his theory of inherited memory as set out in *Life and Habit*. In order to demonstrate that memory is inherited, Butler makes an analogy between how musicians or painters become proficient in their art, that is, by remembering what they did last time; and how impregnate ova develop into humans, namely, via the inherited memory of thousands of generations of impregnate ova. Regarding musicians, he writes:

It is the common tendency of living beings to go on doing what they have been doing most recently. The last habit is the strongest. Hence, if he took great pains last time, he will play better now, and will take a like degree of pains, and play better still next time, and so go on improving while life and vigour last. If, on the other hand, he took less pains last time, he will play worse now, and be inclined to take little pains next time, and so gradually deteriorate. (*LH*, 127)

So the musician, and by extension, the painter, will continue to improve so long as he ‘takes pains’, a phrase that, as I have shown, is Butler’s shorthand for a Lamarckian mechanism of evolution. It connotes effort, work, the development of a skill or physical attribute by repeated use, and all of which are inherited by one’s offspring. As was demonstrated above, the painter is more likely to take pains if he has a lively interest in his subject matter.

Butler singled out Giovanni Bellini as his favourite artist, but he nevertheless appears relatively infrequently in Butler’s two main works of art criticism. In *Ex Voto*, in

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<sup>16</sup> Alexis-François Rio, *The Poetry of Christian Art* (London: Bosworth, 1854), p. 360.

<sup>17</sup> *NB*, p. 146. It is believed that Raphael’s earliest intact altarpiece is the ‘Mond Crucifixion’, painted 1502–03, and now in the National Gallery, London. See Nicholas Penny, ‘Raphael’, in *Oxford Art Online* <<http://0-www.oxfordartonline.com.catalogue.ulrls.lon.ac.uk/subscriber/article/grove/art/T070770>> [accessed 13 September 2012]. Butler is therefore correct in writing that the *Ansidei* altarpiece is a relatively early work of Raphael’s.

particular, Ferrari and Tabachetti dominate the discussion, and it is crucial for Butler's argument that the quality of their work does not decline as they mature. In order to demonstrate this, their works have to be accurately dated. It is for this reason, I suggest, that Butler spent so much time on his painstakingly meticulous connoisseurial work. In the biographical chapter on Ferrari in *Ex Voto*, Butler lists and dates his major works from the 1507 fresco of the Disputation at Santa Maria delle Grazie in Varallo, to the 'several important' but unnamed works executed in Milan between 1539 and his death in 1546.<sup>18</sup> Elinor Shaffer rightly points out that in *Ex Voto* Butler focuses on the work, both early and late, that Ferrari executed at Varallo in order to demonstrate its unity (*Erewhons of the Eye*, p. 112). However, I suggest that this focus is driven more by Butler's concern to demonstrate that Ferrari's work did not undergo a Michelangesque decline into decadence than it is a demonstration of artistic unity. This notwithstanding, according to Butler's attribution and dating, Ferrari's earliest work at the *sacro monte*, the Crucifixion chapel, was executed some time between 1520 and 1528; and his latest, the frescoes in the Magi chapel, between 1536 and 1539 (*EV*, pp. 78–80, 121–22). Given Butler's dating, and given an artistic career spanning from the early 1500s to the early 1540s, Ferrari's work at the *sacro monte* was executed firmly in the latter half of his artistic life. For Butler's purposes, therefore, this is sufficient to refute any charges of artistic decadence, by demonstrating that Ferrari was producing outstanding work towards the end of his life, the unmistakable mark of a great artist: 'Ferrari was like Giovanni Bellini, a slow but steady grower from first to last' (*EV*, p. 122).

In order to strengthen Butler's theory that Ferrari's growth resulted from his own genuine love of his subject, it was also necessary that he be decontaminated from any possible influence by Raphael, Michelangelo, and Leonardo, his contemporaries. Such influence could offer an alternative explanation to that proposed by Butler for the trajectory of his artistic development. Although generally positive towards Rev. S. W. King's 'delightful' *The Italian Valleys of the Pennine Alps* (1858), he disagrees strongly with King's assertion that the high quality of the Magi chapel is due to Ferrari's study under Raphael in Rome (*EV*, pp. 7, 11). As noted above, the frescoes in this chapel were executed towards the end of Ferrari's life, in the late 1530s, 'in his prime'. Butler belligerently asserts that 'it is to years of intervening incessant effort and practice, not to any study under Raphael, that the enlargement of style and greater freedom of design is

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<sup>18</sup> *EV*, pp. 75–82. Amongst others, these include the fresco at Santa Maria della Pace in Milan, now in the Brera Museum, Milan.

due. Gaudenzio never studied under Raphael' (*EV*, p. 11). Shaffer notes that Butler has support from the well-respected connoisseur, Giovanni Morelli on this point, who argues that Ferrari never went to Rome, and therefore never studied under Perugino (the teacher of Raphael); nor was he friendly with Raphael (*Erewhons of the Eye*, p. 107).

As for refuting the influence of Leonardo, Butler makes a strong case that Ferrari studied under Stefano Scotto in Milan, whose school was a rival to that of Leonardo's, also in Milan, at the same time (*EV*, p. 76). However, he does concede that so daring is the whole conception of the form of the *sacro monte* at Varallo — taking the whole mountain as a book to illustrate, and combining life-sized terra-cotta figures with illusionistic frescoes inside a series of chapels — that it would not be unlikely that Leonardo had a hand in the design. This is especially so, given that Leonardo was in Milan from 1481 until 1499, during the time when the idea was first conceived by Varallo's founder Bernardino Caimo in 1486 (*EV*, pp. 60–61). However, whatever Leonardo's initial involvement in the scheme, Butler is convinced that Ferrari was intimately responsible, and describes the development of the site in Lamarckian terms: Ferrari 'evolved it in the course of those unforeseen developments of which design and judgment are never slow to take advantage' (*EV*, p. 61). Butler is referring here to the circumstances under which he believes the frescoes were placed inside the chapels. In one of the earliest chapels, he detects signs of a fresco on the outside wall of the chapel. He conjectures that because of damage from the rain, Ferrari decided to move the frescoes inside the chapel, and thus the *sacro monte* took its now familiar form. In this manner the frescoes were 'so designed as to form an integral part of the composition: the daring scheme of combining the utmost resources of both painting and sculpture in a single work was thus gradually evolved rather than arrived at *per saltum*' (*EV*, pp. 43–44). As I go on to show, one of the signs of genius for Butler is the ability to recognize and take advantage of changes in the environment, as he believed Ferrari had done in developing the form of the *sacro monte*.

Finally, Butler had to decontaminate Ferrari from the negative influence of Michelangelo. Shaffer has traced the reception of Ferrari's work, and notes that Layard, in particular, to whose edition of *Kügler's Handbook* Butler had taken particular objection, had noticed a deterioration in Ferrari's later work, and ascribes it to the malign influence of Michelangelo:

He appears, like many other painters, to have fallen under the influence of *Michael Angelo*, whose works he may possibly have seen in Tuscany, although

it is very doubtful whether he left the north of Italy. The proof of the existence of this influence is furnished by his frescoes in the church of S. Maria delle Grazie at Milan (1542), which are coarse, exaggerated and Michael-Angelesque, with few of the fine qualities of his earlier works.<sup>19</sup>

Butler curtly dismisses this assessment of the alleged decline in quality in Ferrari's works. Layard's inexact description of Varallo suggested to Butler that he had never been there and was therefore guilty of relying on the erroneous verdicts of earlier authorities, rather than examining the frescoes with his own eyes.<sup>20</sup> Although Butler does not discuss any of Ferrari's earlier, pre-Varallo work, the fact that his frescoes at Varallo are of such a high standard is sufficient evidence that the quality of his work did not suffer a decline towards the end of his career. Moreover, the meticulous connoisseurial work undertaken to isolate Ferrari from the influence of Raphael, Leonardo, and Michelangelo demonstrates the importance to Butler of sincerity of motive.

The other artist whose reputation Butler seeks to recuperate in *Ex Voto* is the Flemish sculptor Jean de Wespín, known as Tabachetti when he worked in Italy. Although later critics have confirmed Butler's reappraisal of Ferrari, as attested by the major exhibition of his works at Vercelli in 1956 and by subsequent scholarship, Tabachetti has remained a minor figure. Many of the statues at Varallo that Butler attributes to him have since been reattributed to one of the D'Enrico brothers, either Giovanni, or Tanzio (Shaffer, *Erewhons of the Eye*, pp. 119–22). However, the 'Journey to Calvary' chapel, considered by Butler to be Tabachetti's masterpiece, is still considered his: 'Having regard to grandeur of scheme as well as execution,' Butler considered that this chapel 'should rank as the most daring among Italian works of art in general' (see Fig. 2, p. 170).<sup>21</sup>

Butler's attempt to demonstrate the continuous improvement of Tabachetti is less successful than it was for Ferrari. The key work he adduces is what he believes to be a self-portrait in terra-cotta of Tabachetti as an old man of about eighty (see Fig. 3, p.

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<sup>19</sup> Cited in Shaffer, *Erewhons of the Eye*, p. 107, emphasis in original.

<sup>20</sup> It should be noted that Layard's assertion that Ferrari's later work showed a decline was a major revision of Lady Eastlake's earlier 1874 edition of *Kügler's Handbook*, in which she writes that 'Gaudenzio's last work, the Flagellation, in S. Maria delle Grazie at Milan (1542), is an example, in the figure of the Saviour, of his highest refinement of expression'. See *Handbook of Painting: The Italian Schools*, ed. by Sir Charles L. Eastlake, 4th edn, rev. by Lady Eastlake, 2 vols (London: Murray, 1874), II, 370. Given the scrupulous care with which Butler sought to hold the moral high ground, it is somewhat surprising that he does not mention Lady Eastlake's praise for Ferrari's later work, although he does, maybe grudgingly, acknowledge her comment that Ferrari's 'designs in some instances were "full of grace"' (*EV*, p. 4).

<sup>21</sup> *EV*, p. 165; Iris Kockelbergh, 'Wespín', in *Oxford Art Online* <<http://0-www.oxfordartonline.com.catalogue.oxford.ac.uk/subscriber/article/grove/art/T091208>> [accessed 13 September 2012].

171). Butler views this figure, *Il Vecchietto*, in the chapel of the ‘Descent from the Cross’, as ‘perhaps [...] the finest on the Sacro Monte’ (*EV*, p. 178). When he first comes across it, he is puzzled as to who could have created it. He recognizes that it must have been created by ‘one to whom modelling in clay was like breathing, walking, or eating and drinking, and Gaudenzio [who was primarily a painter] never reached such freedom and proficiency as this’ (*EV*, p. 180). These bodily activities are those listed in the opening chapter of *Life and Habit* that are performed unconsciously due to generations of practice. By extension, Butler is implying that whoever created *Il Vecchietto* must have done so as a result of the effort of many prior generations of clay modellers. Following a long discussion of the likely provenance of the figure, he comes to the conclusion that

I can only say that I have no doubt the Vecchietto is a portrait of Tabachetti himself as an old man getting on for eighty, and rejoice to see that in his extreme old age there is not a trace of failing power, but rather of still ripening genius. (*EV*, p. 185)

However, in a postscript to the preface of the Italian translation of *Ex Voto*, published in 1894, Butler acknowledges his error in the light of recent scholarship, which had established that Tabachetti had died in 1615. Given that he was born about 1569, *Il Vecchietto* could not be a self-portrait of Tabachetti as an old man (*EV*, pp. xx–xxi). Notwithstanding this unsuccessful attempt, it illustrates how important it was for Butler to demonstrate the continuous improvement over the lives of his favourite artists. As I have argued, Butler made an analogy between the development of any skill or moral quality and the evolution of organs such as the eye, which in turn evolve in the same manner as machines and tools. All proceed via the recognition and accumulation of small beneficial variations. According to Butler, such continuous improvement could only be effected by Lamarckian cunning and not Darwinian luck. Moreover, in the case of Ferrari, Butler was able to show that great art could be produced without the imitation of the technical skill of Raphael, Leonardo, or Michelangelo. Neither was the unfashionable Val Sesia where Ferrari worked, far removed from the main centres of Florence and Rome, the obvious location for the self-serving and ambitious artist to find instant fame. For Butler, therefore, his interest in the art of the isolated valleys of Lombardy and Piedmont was not merely a cussed contrarianism, at odds with traditional notions of hierarchy and influence; rather, these peripheral regions provided an idealized space in which he could study the development of art uncontaminated by academicism. He could demonstrate that excellence in art proceeded via sincerity of



motive, a moral quality embodied within the frescoes and sculptures of the *sacro monte* itself.

The assertion of the ‘still ripening genius’ of Tabachetti raises the question of how to accommodate the notion of genius within Butler’s Lamarckian aesthetics. Its connotations of innate and effortless superiority seem to sit uneasily with his notions of purity of motive and constant application. A starting point may be Ernest Pontifex’s idea of genius as described in *The Way of All Flesh*:

Nor yet did [Ernest] know that ideas, no less than the living beings in whose minds they arise, must be begotten by parents not very unlike themselves, the most original still differing but slightly from the parents that have given rise to them. Life is like a fugue, everything must grow out of the subject and there must be nothing new [...]. He thought that ideas came into clever people’s heads by a kind of spontaneous germination, without parentage in the thoughts of others or the course of observation; for as yet he believed in genius, of which he well knew that he had none, if it was the fine frenzied thing he thought it was.<sup>22</sup>

Ernest’s idea of genius as ‘a kind of spontaneous generation, without parentage’, recalls the lone romantic genius much like that self-fashioned by Darwin, which Butler had witheringly undermined in *Unconscious Memory*. There, Butler describes the first edition of the *Origin of Species* ‘as a kind of literary Melchisedec, without father and without mother, in the works of other people’ (*UM*, p. 8). The implication being, of course, that Darwin had deliberately hidden the parentage of his work in order to claim sole credit for his evolutionary ideas. Butler dismisses this romantic notion of genius, as he did all other Melchisedecs, and instead insists that genius was not opposed to effort, and could thus evolve via the Lamarckian mechanism of taking pains. In this manner, he was able to accommodate the notion of genius within his schema of the ideal artist.

It appears that Butler first came across the possibility of such an accommodation in his reading of Buffon. In *Evolution, Old and New*, he cites Buffon as asserting that ‘genius is but a supreme capacity for taking pains’ (p. 67). So, rather than indicating an effortless superiority, genius is a mark of exactly the reverse. Francis Galton, too, in *Hereditary Genius* (1869), bases his notion of genius, in part, upon the capacity for hard work. He selects his universe of geniuses on the basis of their reputation, which he considers an indication of natural ability. As for natural ability, he writes that ‘I do not mean capacity without zeal, nor zeal without capacity, nor even a combination of both

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<sup>22</sup> *WF*, p. 229. Penelope Murray writes of ‘Plato’s doctrine of poetic inspiration as a kind of frenzy’, in *Genius: The History of an Idea*, ed. by Penelope Murray (Oxford: Blackwell, 1989), p. 4.

of them, without an adequate power of doing a great deal of very laborious work'.<sup>23</sup> However, this definition is heavily qualified by Butler when he alludes to it in his long Notebook entry on 'Genius': 'People who are credited with genius have, indeed, been sometimes very painstaking, but they would often show more signs of genius if they had taken less [...]. Pains can serve genius, or even mar it, but they cannot make it' (*NB*, pp. 173–74).

However, this begs the question as to the personal identity to which genius is ascribed. As we have seen, for Butler, personal identity stretches back through countless generations to the primordial cell, so even if genius appears to be effortless in its most recent manifestation, this in itself is evidence of generations of ancestral effort, the fruits of which are borne by the present generation. Butler concludes that

though it is wrong to suppose the essence of genius to lie in a capacity for taking pains, it is right to hold that it must have been rooted in pains and that it cannot have grown up without them. (*NB*, p. 174)

Although he does not specifically refer to the genius of Giovanni Bellini, Ferrari, or Tabachetti as the result of hereditary transmission, he does nevertheless investigate the family history deeply enough, particularly of Ferrari and Tabachetti, to imply that this is the case. Of course, Giovanni Bellini was much better known than either of these, and it would have been common knowledge amongst the cognoscenti that he came from a family of artists, his father Jacopo and brother Gentile being accomplished painters in their own right. Galton, in fact, adduces the Bellinis as evidence that artistic genius is hereditary (pp. 248–49). Butler notes that Ferrari's father was also a painter (*EV*, p. 75); whilst in his meticulous research into the origins of Tabachetti, he discovers that he was born into 'the leading family at Dinant [in Belgium]' and that 'they were many of them copper-beaters by profession, and this trained them to be sculptors at the same time' (*EV*, p. 85).

Such a definition of hereditary genius as the fruit of ancestral effort is elaborated at some length in *Life and Habit*. However, Butler must also accommodate genius within his notion of continuous artistic improvement over the lives of his favourite painters and novelists. He describes our attempt to assimilate new improved practices or ideas in terms of a conflict between our inherited memory and the new improvements we try to assimilate, and illustrates this using the metaphor of crossing, as I have discussed above.

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<sup>23</sup> Francis Galton, *Hereditary Genius: An Inquiry into its Laws and Consequences* (London: Macmillan, 1869), p. 37.

If the new ideas differ too greatly from the old — if, in biological terms they are two different species — then the new ideas will not be assimilated, just as the crossing of different species tends to produce sterile hybrids. The ability to recognize and assimilate improvements to our existing practices and ideas is in itself a skill that improves with repeated use, and genius is a measure of the extent to which this skill is possessed (*LH*, pp. 128–30). For Butler, genius lies at one end of a continuum of accomplishment, so men of genius differ only in degree rather than in kind from others. For those of lesser genius, the inherited memory of prior actions or ideas is so strong that even if they are able to recognize improvements when they find them, they are unable to assimilate them. Genius thus conceived is therefore synonymous with his ideal of continuous improvement towards, if asymptotically, the telos of artistic perfection:

A single impression, though involving considerable departure from our routine, makes its mark so deeply that we adopt the new at once, though not without difficulty, and repeat it in our next performance, and henceforward in all others; but those who vary their performance thus readily will show a tendency to vary subsequent performances according as they receive fresh ideas from others, or reason them out independently. They are men of genius. (*LH*, p. 130)

These two conceptions of genius as the fruit of ancestral effort and as the ability to show continuous improvement illustrate how Butler integrated the ideas of nature and culture. On the one hand, genius is innate in the sense that it is acquired hereditarily. However, even if such an innate quality is absent, this does not preclude the possibility that the individual is able to recognize and assimilate improvements to their practices and ideas. Such assimilation into memory would then be inherited in Lamarckian fashion by one's progeny, which would increase the tendency to recognize and assimilate improvements in future generations.

Later, he suggests that genius thus conceived is one of the means by which new species could be originated:

It would seem probable that in many races geniuses have from time to time arisen who remembered not only their past experiences, as far as action and habit went, but have been able to rise in some degree above habit where they felt that improvement was possible, and who carried such improvement into further practice [...]. It is by these rare instances of intellectual genius [...] that many species have been, in all probability, originated or modified. (*LH*, pp. 172–73)

This is one of the key points on which his rejection of Darwinian natural selection stands. It is worth reiterating that such accumulation of improvements would not be possible

without the cunning of the organism to recognize them as such, and to differentiate them from those new experiences that did not result in improvement. For Butler, continuous improvement, whether in the individual or the species, could only result from the application of Lamarckian cunning rather than Darwinian luck. As was highlighted in Chapter 2, Darwin recognized that this objection, raised by Mivart amongst others, was the most difficult to answer.

Having argued that Butler's writings on art constitute a Lamarckian aesthetics, and explained how he thus theorized the development of the individual artist, we are moving closer to an understanding of how Butler's theory of the ontogenic development of the individual artist is paralleled by the development of art as a whole. Progress, whether of the biological species, or of the individual artist, is the result of those who recognize the possibility of improvement, and have both the power and the desire to effect the changes made possible by these new circumstances. There is no inconsistency between Butler's conception of genius and his Lamarckian-inflected notion of teleological progression. Ultimately, genius is synonymous with continuous improvement. In the next section, I show how this radically undercut the fin-de-siècle association of genius and degeneration, especially in the work of Max Nordau.

### **Butler's theory of the development of art**

In none of his works of art criticism does Butler provide a comprehensive overview of the history of art. Neither would it be possible to construct one from his various writings, given his focus on the art of a specific location, Lombardy and Piedmont, at a specific time, primarily the sixteenth century. One must turn, therefore, to the outline of the history of Erewhonian art he added to the 1901 edition of *Erewhon* for clues. In this, he discusses the former practice of erecting memorial statues for the illustrious dead, and of how this practice had fallen into desuetude. Five hundred years earlier, however, 'the city had been [...] overrun with these pests' (*E*, p. 128). He attributes the decline to the less-than-moral, self-serving motives of their creators: 'they were generally foisted on the public by some coterie that was trying to exalt itself in exalting some one else [...]. Statues so begotten could never be anything but deformities' (p. 128). Moral turpitude thus leads to birth defects. So many of these public statues were erected that eventually there was a furious iconoclastic outbreak in which they were all destroyed. The period of artistic decadence thus ended and for about two hundred years no statues were built.

The genealogical line of second-rate sculptors had exhausted itself due to their immoral motives.

Nevertheless, the artistic instinct remained latent within the collective Erewhonian cultural memory, and eventually the atavistic tendency to create public sculpture reasserted itself. The new generation of sculptors had no recent models by which they could be corrupted, and hence had to learn once again from the basics:

Not knowing how to make [sculptures], and having no academies to mislead them, the earliest sculptors of this period thought things out for themselves, and again produced works that were full of interest, so that in three or four generations they reached a perfection hardly if at all inferior to that of several hundred years earlier. (p. 129)

In Erewhon, therefore, the destruction of all public statuary means that aspiring sculptors have no academic models to fall back on, and must create art by seeing through their own eyes. This, coupled with an absence of contamination from the deformities of recent art, allows a new genealogical line to unfold, aided by the acquisition of increasing technical skill — *gnosis* — bequeathed in Lamarckian fashion to future generations of sculptors. Such skill is, nevertheless, always subordinate to the sincerity of motive — *agape* — that originates all great art. But in *Erewhon*, Butler also meditates on the ephemerality of that perfection to which art, progressing upwards via sincerity of motive will tend:

I know not why, but all the noblest arts hold in perfection but for a very little moment. They soon reach a height from which they begin to decline, and when they have begun to decline it is a pity that they cannot be knocked on the head; for an art is like a living organism — better dead than dying. There is no way of making an aged art young again; it must be born anew and grow up from infancy as a new thing, working out its own salvation from effort to effort in all fear and trembling. (p. 128)

There is no Darwinian luck involved in this account of the evolution of art; rather, it is a product of Lamarckian cunning and effort propelling it forward towards its moment of perfection. In advocating a cultural euthanasia, however, Butler suggests that art as a whole follows a life cycle similar to the individual artist. One of the fundamental flaws he highlighted in his criticism of the academic system was that it forced young students to look at nature through the eyes of old men, rather than allowing them to progress naturally from the ‘embryonic stages’ through to maturity in their acquisition of technical skill (*AS*, p. 127). Culture too should be allowed to progress naturally, and be put out of its misery when it begins to decline, allowing a new cycle of improvement to commence.

Returning to Butler's works of art criticism, these Erewhonian notions on the decline of art usefully shed light upon his preference for Bellini, Ferrari, and Tabachetti over the three masters of the High Renaissance. Given the ephemerality of artistic perfection, it is axiomatic that very few artworks can be placed at this peak: most '[offer] signs either of immaturity or decline'. However, great as is his admiration for Bellini or Ferrari, '[neither] of them say the last word that is to be said in their respective arts.' In contrast, 'Michael Angelo said the last word; but then he said just a word or two over' (*EV*, pp. 180–81). So, for Butler, what distinguishes his preference for Bellini and Ferrari over Michelangelo is that they were still improving when they died, whereas Michelangelo's work declined as he matured. And, as described above, this decline is a symptom of an insincerity of motive.

Tabachetti plays an important role in Butler's critique of the Renaissance, since he was working at Varallo much later than Ferrari, in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, during a period widely considered to be one of decline into mannerism and the baroque, after the apotheosis of the High Renaissance. That Butler ranked his work so highly allows him to construct another narrative of this period of Italian art, unsullied by the decadence of the cultural centres of Rome, Florence, and Venice. The high quality of Tabachetti's work at Varallo attests to the importance of local conditions in shaping an artist's output. Moreover, it demonstrates how Tabachetti in his work at Varallo had assimilated the tradition that commenced with Ferrari at the beginning of the sixteenth century. The art of the *sacro monte* therefore continued to improve at a time of decline elsewhere:

It cannot, indeed, be pretended that Tabachetti's style is as pure as that of his great predecessor [Ferrari], but what it has lost in purity, it has gained in freedom and vigour [...]. The stronger a man is the more certainly will he be modified by his own times as well as modify them, and in an age of *barocco* we must not look for Donatellos. Still, the more Tabachetti's work is examined the more will it be observed that he took no harm from the *barocco*, but kept its freedom while avoiding its coarseness and exaggeration. (*EV*, pp. 165–66)

We see here, therefore, that Butler is not denying that Tabachetti was unaffected by the changed cultural environment in which he produced his art. Rather, he was able to recognize the improvements presented amongst the various changes, and to assimilate these selectively into his work, whilst still remaining true to the *sacro monte* tradition inaugurated by Ferrari. For Butler, this is an example of a fertile cross of ideas, and, as I have discussed above, is evidence of artistic genius. Via this gradual assimilation of new

ideas into a well-established tradition, therefore, the local art of the *sacro monte* is able to progress, in contrast to the general decline elsewhere in Italy.

Furthermore, not only was Tabachetti working many decades later than Ferrari, but also, unlike his predecessor, he was not a native of the Val Sesia. Rather, Butler establishes that he was born in Dinant, in Belgium, and travelled to Italy to work. The assimilation of the tradition of Ferrari into Tabachetti's own work therefore illustrates the benefits of a fertile cross between two cultures, North and South, that are different, but not too different for one to be assimilated into the other. In this sense, the work of Tabachetti at Varallo is a specifically artistic manifestation of the more general crossing between North and South, that renders the liminal Val Sesia — in Italy, but very close to the Swiss border — peculiarly attractive to Butler, and whose inhabitants have benefited from centuries of transalpine intermarriage, giving them the good characteristics of both north and south Europe. Tabachetti, therefore, provides a counter-example to the Vasarian narrative of a decline into mannerism and the baroque following the High Renaissance art of Raphael, Leonardo, and Michelangelo. But Butler was also critical of the artists of his own day, who adhered to academic rules through a wish to please academicians, rather than pleasing themselves.

Just as Tabachetti demonstrated for Butler that the production of good art was possible in a period of generally sham art, so he found a nineteenth-century exemplar in the obscure Valsesian artist, Dedomenici da Rossa. In his 1871 article 'Dedomenici da Rossa', written ten years before the publication of *Alps and Sanctuaries*, Butler offers Dedomenici as a model by which the academy-induced decline in Italian art that had taken place since the sixteenth century could be reversed. In the church of San Gaudenzio in Varallo, Butler comes across a painting of the Virgin and Child for which he finds difficulty classifying either stylistically or by period: 'if an old picture, it was an anachronism as too modern, if a modern one, it was infinitely more so, as being instinct with a feeling that had been supposed to have been long dead.'<sup>24</sup> Butler also notes the lack of technical skill with which the drapery is painted, and which

arose, if not unconsciously, at any rate unself-consciously from the painter's being puzzled with the intricacy of what he saw, and giving as much as he could of it with a hand which, as Leonardo da Vinci says, was less advanced than his judgment. (p. 244)

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<sup>24</sup> 'Dedomenici da Rossa', in *Shrewsbury Edition*, ed. by Jones and Bartholomew, I: *A First Year in Canterbury Settlement*, 242–45 (p. 244).

It is only after consulting the sacristan of the church that Butler learns, to his surprise, that it had been painted forty or fifty years earlier by a local Valsesian artist, Dedomenici da Rossa. More significantly for Butler, since it is the reason he has difficulty in dating the painting or classifying it stylistically, he learns ‘that the painter had never had any course of instruction, and that he had picked up his art almost entirely by himself as best he could’ (p. 244). Dedomenici was born in 1758 in the Val Sesia, and worked there all his life, far away from the main cultural centres in which he could have received formal art instruction. Because of this isolation, he had

to look at nature for himself, with his own eyes, and not with those of others. The early [*quattrocento*] masters did this because there were no others whose eyes they could look through. Dedomenici did it because he could not get at such others [...]. Both having taken the same road arrived at the same result. (p. 245)

The excellence in art that Dedomenici attains, and that he shares with the *quattrocento* Italian painters, is, therefore, due to his reliance on his own observations rather than by following the rules of the academicians. More generally, the example of Dedomenici illustrates that the history of art is not deterministic, that the decline of Italian art was not an inevitability, as long as artists were guided by their own sincerity of motive rather than blindly following academic tradition.

It is worth contrasting Butler’s view of Dedomenici with that of Raphael, in order to illustrate more clearly his views on sincerity and technical skill discussed in the previous section. Butler’s most sustained meditation on one of the three masters of the High Renaissance comes not in either of his two full-length works of art criticism, but in a long notebook entry on Raphael’s ‘Ansidei Madonna’, the altarpiece referred to above, which had been purchased by London’s National Gallery in 1885. The note opens with an exposure of Raphael’s less-than-sincere motivation in painting the altarpiece: it ‘is inspired by no deeper feelings than a determination to adhere to the conventions of the time’ (*NB*, p. 144). Going on to discuss some of the details of the painting, Butler complains that ‘all is monotonous, unobservant, unimaginative — the work of a feeble man whose pains will never extend much beyond those necessary to make him pass as stronger than he is’ (p. 146). For Butler, it is Raphael’s lack of genuine feeling for his subject that condemns his altarpiece to mediocrity: ‘there are no bits of detail worked out as by one who was interested in them and enjoyed them’ (p. 146). Just as Butler noted the defects in the drapery of Dedomenici’s ‘Madonna and Child’, so he notes those of the nose of Saint Nicholas in Raphael’s altarpiece. However, it is not the lack of



technical skill *per se* that concerns Butler, but the different motives betrayed by the defects in the two paintings. He had excused Dedomenici's defects on the basis that they were evidence that he was seeing with his own eyes, and taking genuine pains to represent truthfully what he saw. For Raphael, however,

this [is] not the weakness of a child who is taking much pains to do something beyond his strength, and whose intention can be felt through and above the imperfections of his performance [...], but of one who is not even conscious of weakness save by way of impatience that his work should cost him time and trouble at all, and who is satisfied if he can turn it out well enough to take in patrons who have themselves never either drawn or painted. (*NB*, p. 148)

Butler is explicitly accusing Raphael of 'hoodwinking the public', just as he had accused Darwin in his earlier evolutionary works, and which stands in contrast to the sincerity and truth to nature implicit in the work of Dedomenici.

When Butler discusses sincerity and truth in painting, however, it is important to point out that his idea of painting true to nature is very different to that of the Ruskin-influenced PRB. As noted above, sincerity for Butler refers to motive rather than to the photographic realism of the representation. His clearest exposition comes in *Life and Habit*:

If one is painting a hillside at a sufficient distance, and cannot see whether it is covered with chestnut-trees or walnuts, one is not bound to go across the valley to see [...]. Which is a more truthful view of Shrewsbury, for example, from a spot where St. Alkmund's spire is in parallax with St. Mary's — a view which should give only the one spire which can be seen, or one which should give them both, although the one is hidden? There would be, I take it, more representation in the misrepresentation than in the representation [...]. All truth and no error cannot be given by the scientist more than by the artist. (pp. 246–47)

Butler's aesthetics are thereby used as a means to critique the limitations of the professed objectivity of scientific naturalism. His conception of truth is very close to what Lorraine Daston and Peter Galison have described as 'truth-to-nature'. They have described a shift from 'truth-to-nature' to 'mechanical objectivity' over the course of the nineteenth century in the images produced for illustrated scientific works. By 'truth-to-nature' they mean the practice of artists to represent an idealized specimen rather than the probably flawed individual specimen they copied. It involved them selecting and perfecting the traits and features most characteristic of the species and faithfully recording these. Daston and Galison detect a shift in the mid-nineteenth century away from this subjective recording of nature to 'methods aimed at automatism', in order to produce

images ‘untainted by subjectivity’ (Daston and Galison, pp. 42–43). For Butler, however, such objective images were less truthful than the earlier idealized ones, as his discussion of the most truthful view of Shrewsbury shows. The selection of detail was another criterion Butler used to evaluate an artwork, and this forms the basis of his critique of the aesthetics of the PRB.

Butler had met Dante Gabriel Rossetti soon after the publication of *Erewhon*. But as in the case of Darwin, his opinion of Rossetti’s work was inseparable from what he thought of the man: his art criticism thereby took the form of an *ad hominem* attack. In a letter to Eliza Savage he writes of Rossetti that ‘I dislike his face, and his manner, and his work, and I hate his poetry, and his friends. He is wrapped up in self-conceit and lives upon adulation.’<sup>25</sup> After Rossetti’s death in 1882, some of his paintings were shown at the Royal Academy Winter Exhibition, which Butler visited: ‘I have been to see it and am pleased to find it more odious than I had even dared to hope.’<sup>26</sup> Sidney Colvin and Harry Quilter both reviewed Rossetti’s posthumous exhibition, in the *Magazine of Art* and the *Contemporary Review*, respectively.<sup>27</sup> At the time, Colvin, a close friend of both Ruskin and Edward Burne-Jones, and erstwhile member of the Rossetti circle, was Slade Professor of Fine Art at Cambridge, a post he had held since 1873, and for which Butler and Quilter were applicants when he vacated the position in 1885.

Apart from the brief specific references in his letters and notebook entries, in which he baldly states his dislike of both Rossetti the man and his paintings, Butler does not elaborate on the underlying aesthetic reasons, and he certainly never describes the trajectory of Rossetti’s artistic output. Interestingly, however, both Colvin and Quilter in their reviews, although positive, describe a deterioration in Rossetti’s later works. Colvin, in particular, lapses into the discourse of fin-de-siècle degeneration debates, although not, as I show below, using the same imagery of senility as used by Max Nordau on his chapter on the PRB in *Degeneration* (1892, trans. 1895). Colvin remarks that some of the facial features of Rossetti’s portraits ‘almost degenerate into caricature’; ‘his sense of colour becomes sicklied’; ‘in the flesh particularly, he in many pictures of this date gets a morbid tint into the shadows.’<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> *Letters between Samuel Butler and Miss E. M. A. Savage 1871–1885*, ed. by Geoffrey Keynes and Brian Hill (London: Cape, 1935), pp. 32–33 (23 September 1872).

<sup>26</sup> *Further Extracts*, ed. by Bartholomew, p. 86.

<sup>27</sup> Sidney Colvin, ‘Rossetti as a Painter’, *Magazine of Art*, January 1883, pp. 177–83; Harry Quilter, ‘The Art of Rossetti’, *Contemporary Review*, February 1883, pp. 190–203.

<sup>28</sup> Quilter, p. 196; Colvin, p. 183.

Despite the lack of any sustained attack on the PRB in Butler's writings, one can infer as to why he held them in such contempt. Towards the end of *The Fair Haven*, John Owen is defending the inaccuracy of the Gospel records, and he asks rhetorically,

Does any great artist ever dream of aiming directly at imitation? He aims at representation — not at imitation. In order to attain true mastery here, he must spend years in learning how to see; and then no less time in learning how *not* to see. (p. 219)

John goes on to note the impossibility of absolute reproduction, and that the most that can be done is to 'convey an impression' (p. 219). He describes the evolution of art in terms of a dialectic between imitation and representation, or, as he also describes it, between the 'child-like worship of the letter' and the 'manful apprehension of the spirit' (p. 219). This imagery is consonant with the cycle of euthanasia and rebirth Butler describes in *Erewhon* to account for the rejuvenation of Erewhonian art. For Owen, the *quattrocento* Pre-Raphaelites, such as Giovanni Bellini, aimed at 'absolute reproduction' or the letter, whilst their more illustrious successors, including Raphael, 'saw all that their predecessors had seen, but also something higher' (p. 219). This, obviously, is the converse of Butler's own belief, but his satirizing of John's aesthetics must be read in the context of the chapter in which it appears, and in which he highlights John's self-deception. As I go on to show, it was precisely the sincerity and 'apprehension of the spirit' of the *quattrocento* Pre-Raphaelites that distinguished them from their nineteenth-century namesakes.

In one of the more extended Art Notes in his notebooks, Butler discusses the importance of the selection of detail in distinguishing good art from bad. Echoing Owen's earlier sentiments, he argues that because it is impossible for the artist to reproduce his subject exactly as he sees it, 'his business is to supply those details which will most readily bring the whole before the mind along with them' (*NB*, p. 93). For Butler, the skilled artist will do this instinctively by using as few details as possible. The skill thereby lies in knowing which details are important and which are not. A highly finished painting full of detail is too prescriptive, and detracts from the role of the observer in ascribing meaning. Unless the creator of such a painting has ranked each feature by importance, and has excluded any that are less important than those included,

we feel as though we were with a troublesome cicerone who will not let us look at things with our own eyes but keeps intruding himself at every touch and turn and trying to exercise that undue influence upon us which generally proves to have been the accompaniment of concealment and fraud. (*NB*, p. 95)

I suggest that one of the technical reasons for Butler's dislike of the paintings of the PRB was precisely this prescriptiveness and the lack of distinction made in the selection of detail amassed before the observer. Moreover, that it is not the mass of detail *per se* that Butler finds aesthetically abhorrent, but the lack of discrimination in its selection, is demonstrated by his admiration for the paintings of Van Eyck, a painter he characterizes by his 'high finish': 'Van Eyck's finish is saved because up to the last he is essentially impressionist, that is, he keeps a just account of relative importances and keeps them in their true subordination one to another.'<sup>29</sup> However, this artistic trait obviously has, in Butler's eyes, its counterpart in the character of the artist, and is symptomatic of an authoritative 'aesthetic reign of terror' under which the observer is told what he should like by a 'troublesome cicerone'.<sup>30</sup>

Max Nordau devoted a whole chapter of *Degeneration* to a coruscating criticism of the PRB, and there are some striking similarities between this criticism and the aesthetics of Butler. First, he too comments on the lack of discrimination in the PRB's painting of detail. In Nordau's aesthetics, the highest effect of a work of art is that it 'brings out details [...] which until then the inartistic beholder had not been by himself able to perceive'; 'it discloses to the spectator the hidden treasures of the phenomenal world.'<sup>31</sup> In contrast, the PRB's method of rendering every object in focus within their field of vision, and painting each with the minutest of detail is contrary to how we view the world. For Nordau, an artist should 'make clear to us what phenomenon has engrossed him, and what his picture is to show us' (p. 84). By rendering every feature with equal clarity, the observer has no idea on which to focus their attention.

Second, Nordau compares the PRB unfavourably with their *quattrocento* predecessors, and blames this decline on their misunderstanding of Ruskin, 'a Torquemada of aesthetics', who exerted a malign influence over them (p. 77). Although alluding to the Inquisition rather than the French Revolution, Nordau's phrase recalls Butler's 'aesthetic reign of terror' exercised by the academy. According to Nordau, the

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<sup>29</sup> *NB*, p. 152. It is curious, perhaps, that although Butler wrote so much about art, I have found no comment at all on the French Impressionists who held eight independent exhibitions in Paris between 1874 and 1886, a period during which Butler had written *Alps and Sanctuaries*, and was beginning to write *Ex Voto*. One contemporary review described the Impressionists and the PRB as at opposite ends of the artistic spectrum. See Frederick Wedmore, 'Pictures in Paris. — The Exhibition of "Les Impressionistes"', *Examiner*, 13 June 1874, pp. 633–34 (p. 633).

<sup>30</sup> Butler uses the expression 'aesthetic reign of terror' early in *Alps and Sanctuaries*, in a different context. There it describes the pressure under which an observer of art is forced to have an opinion on a painting (p. 7).

<sup>31</sup> Max Nordau, *Degeneration*, 7th edn (New York: Appleton, 1895), p. 80.

PRB found their ‘art-ideal’ in the preface to the first volume of *Modern Painters* (1843): ‘form as indifferent, idea as everything; the clumsier the representation, the deeper its effect; the devotion of faith as the only worthy import of a work of art’; and they found the model for this ideal in the ‘archaic Italian school’, that is, in the *quattrocento* Pre-Raphaelites (p. 79). However, Nordau believes that the PRB had ‘misunderstood [Ruskin’s] misunderstanding’ of the true principles of art. Whereas Ruskin ‘had simply said that defectiveness in form can be counter-balanced by devotion and noble feeling in the artist’, they went one step further and maintained ‘that in order to express devotion and noble feeling, the artist must be defective in form’ (p. 81). As a result, the PRB merely succeeded in imitating the ‘awkward stiffness’ of their predecessors, without apprehending the sincerity with which Cimabue and Giotto, for instance, sought ‘to get closer to nature, and to free themselves from the thralldom of the Byzantine school’ (p. 81). Nordau writes that whereas ‘the former had first to find out how to draw and paint correctly, [...] the latter wished to forget it’ (p. 82). This phrase is almost identical to Butler’s idea, expressed in his notebooks, that ‘after having spent years striving to be accurate, we must spend as many more in discovering when and how to be inaccurate (*NB*, p. 136).

Third, in an uncanny echo of a phrase in *The Fair Haven*, Nordau writes that for the English romantics, the progenitors of the PRB, ‘the Middle Ages had a powerful attraction, inasmuch as it was the period of childlike faith in the letter’ (p. 75). As described above, in the conclusion to *The Fair Haven* John Owen compares imitation unfavourably with representation, describing the two modes as, respectively, the ‘child-like worship of the letter’ and the ‘manful apprehension of the spirit’. Later, Nordau would use almost identical imagery in his comparison of the *quattrocento* pre-Raphaelites with their nineteenth-century imitators. This difference is ‘between the first babbling of a thriving infant and the stammering of a mentally enfeebled gray-beard; between child-like and childish’ (p. 82).

However, despite these remarkable verbal and figural similarities in the second and third of these comparisons, the conclusions drawn by Butler and Nordau are diametrically opposed, and they turn on Butler’s harmonization of the young/old opposition. For Nordau, the degeneracy of the PRB is described as the second childhood of senility, the ‘mentally enfeebled gray-beard’. In contrast, childhood, for Butler is a time when our knowledge is most perfect, for the simple reason that more of our ancestors have passed through the childhood stage than through old age: more

people reach the age of five, say, than reach the age of seventy-five. Since we inherit the accumulated memory of our ancestors, we remember, unconsciously, more of their habits when children than of when they are old. In the conclusion to *Life and Habit*, Butler writes:

It is the young and fair, then, who are the truly old and truly experienced; it is they who alone have a trustworthy memory to guide them; they alone know things as they are, and it is from them that, as we grow older, we must study if we would still cling to truth [...]. When we say that we are getting old, we should say rather that we are getting new or young, and are suffering from inexperience, which drives us into doing things which we do not understand, and lands us, eventually, in the utter impotence of death. (p. 244)

The old are inexperienced because few of their ancestors reached the same age and they therefore have little ancestral memory of old age.

The comparison with Nordau, does, I suggest, set the optimistic tone of Butler's Lamarckian aesthetics starkly in relief. Despite their common dislike of contemporary British art, at least as represented by the work of the PRB, Butler offers a concrete remedy. Unlike the inevitability of decline inherent within Nordau's imagery of senility, Butler offers the possibility of rejuvenation, and it comes, too, from a return to a child-like naivety, which engenders a true rather than a sham art. Just as in Erewhon, where the quality of sculpture returned to its former heights as a result of the absence of academic models, so the sham contemporary art can be displaced by the true art of models such as Dedomenici da Rossa. Much of this chapter draws upon Butler's Lamarckism supplemented by his theory of inherited memory set out in *Life and Habit*, a work described by one reviewer as pessimistic. Butler answered this charge publicly thus:

I have a very vague idea what pessimism means, but I should be sorry to believe that I am a pessimist. Which, I would ask, is the pessimist? He who sees love of beauty, design, steadfastness of purpose, intelligence, courage, and every quality to which success has assigned the name of 'worth,' as having drawn the pattern of every leaf and organ now and in all past time, or he who sees nothing in the world of nature but a chapter of accidents and of forces interacting blindly? (*EON*, p. 52)

Not only did Butler offer a new way of viewing the Renaissance, but his Lamarckian aesthetics, with its message of rejuvenation, offered a hopeful vision of the fin de siècle in contrast to the possibility, if not probability, of degeneration implicit within Darwinian evolutionary theory.





Figure 2: Chapel of the Journey to Calvary, Varallo  
Image credit: © 2004 Stefano Bistolfi, Wikimedia Commons.



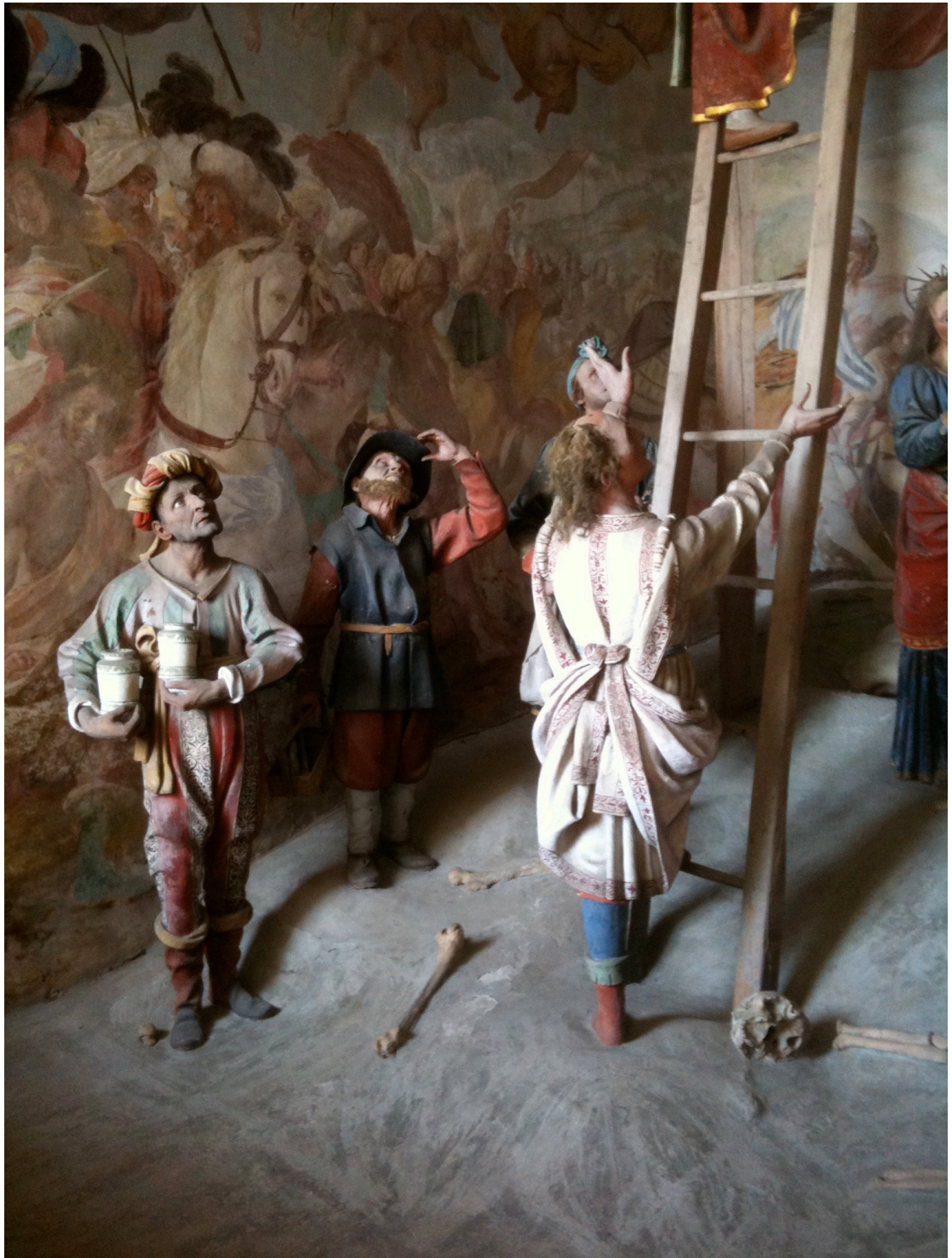


Figure 3: *Il Vecchietto* (second figure from left), in the Chapel of the Descent from the Cross, Varallo  
Image credit: © 2011 David Gillott (CC BY 3.0).



## Chapter 5

### Towards a Posthumous Life

#### Literary self-fashioning

From the publication of *Ex Voto* in 1888 until his death in 1902, Butler was occupied with three major projects — a biography, classical scholarship, and the editing of his unpublished letters and notebooks — all of which would result in multi-volume works. He also completed two shorter works, *Shakespeare's Sonnets Reconsidered* (1899) and *Erewhon Revisited* (1901). In the former, Butler reordered the sonnets in order to construct what he believed to be a coherent narrative of a murky episode in the life of the young Shakespeare, and it illustrates the centrality to Butler's thought of the harmonics between work and author. Likewise, all three of his late major projects are in some way preoccupied with the textuality of the author's life, of the discovery and appreciation of the individual mind embodied within the text. They can therefore be read as the culmination of Butler's sometimes paradoxical writing on the nature of personal identity and its relationship with authorship as inflected by his theory of inherited memory and his Lamarckism.

The first major project was the *Life and Letters* of his grandfather, Dr Samuel Butler (1774–1839).<sup>1</sup> Early in 1888, Butler was asked by the Shrewsbury Archaeological Society to write a memoir of his grandfather, who had been headmaster of Shrewsbury School from 1798 to 1836 (Jones, *Memoir*, II, 71). On his retirement, Dr Butler was appointed Bishop of Coventry and Lichfield, a post he held until his death in 1839, coincidentally on grandson Samuel's fourth birthday. In all the standard editions of *The Way of All Flesh*, Butler's grandfather is damningly portrayed in the guise of the financially successful but culturally illiterate George Pontifex. George is mocked for the execrable Romantic verse he writes after seeing the Alps, and for his effusive and uncritical praise of the artists Butler disliked. He is compared unflatteringly with the priggish art critics of Butler's own time: 'I suppose that a prig with more money than brains was much the same sixty or seventy years ago as he is now' (*WF*, pp. 46, 47).

This damning portrayal is most evident in chapters 4 and 5. However, in the manuscript used by Streatfeild to publish the 1903 edition, on which most subsequent

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<sup>1</sup> *Shrewsbury Edition*, ed. by Jones and Bartholomew, X, XI: *The Life and Letters of Dr. Samuel Butler*, 2 vols. Further references to these volumes are given after quotations in the text and prefixed *LL* followed by the volume number, I or II.

editions are based, these chapters are missing. Streatfeild found what he thought to be notes relating to these missing chapters amongst Butler's other papers, and used these notes to reconstruct them. The chapters include episodes that are taken almost verbatim from Dr Butler's correspondence, including the romantic effusions within a diary entry relating to his first sight of Mont Blanc, and the letter from a lady describing the sale of a clergyman's sermons for 'three halfpence a pound'.<sup>2</sup> No further changes were made to the manuscript of *The Way of All Flesh* after 1885, and Jones explains that although Butler intended to amend it before his death to remove the 'libel', he never did so (*Memoir*, II, 73). I suggest, however, that after reading through his grandfather's correspondence in preparation for writing the *Life and Letters*, Butler *did* remove the offending two chapters from the manuscript. Streatfeild, therefore, in publishing *The Way of All Flesh* in 1903, inadvertently reintroduced material that Butler had deliberately excluded. This background to the publication of *The Way of All Flesh* is significant as it highlights the contingency of a posthumous reputation on the recoverability of related texts, and on the partial selection of those texts that are recoverable. In other words, it highlights the textuality of reputation and suggests a reason for Butler's sedulous editing of his notebooks and letters in fashioning his own afterlife.

The second major project was Butler's re-engagement with Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*. Under Dr Butler's headship, Shrewsbury School had become pre-eminent in classical education, and Butler himself was bracketed twelfth in the Classical Tripos class list at Cambridge in 1858. The re-engagement began in 1886 after reading Charles Lamb's translation of the *Odyssey*, when he decided to write *Ulysses*, a Handelian oratorio.<sup>3</sup> This was the first time Butler had read the *Odyssey* for some thirty-five years, which forced him to read it with 'fresh eyes' rather than under the influence of the ossified ideas of his classics master.<sup>4</sup> It will be remembered that Butler recommended such a mode of seeing in his works of art criticism, via the cultivation of the 'ignorant eye' (Shaffer, *Erewhons of the Eye*, p. 59). When he commenced his own translation of the *Odyssey* in 1891 he became convinced that its author was female, rather than the male Homer of the *Iliad* (Jones, *Memoir*, II, 105–06). He published his own prose translations

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<sup>2</sup> Compare *LL*, I, 193 with *WF*, p. 46; and *LL*, II, 136 with *WF*, p. 425. For an account of the textual history of these missing chapters see *Shrewsbury Edition*, ed. by Jones and Bartholomew, XVII: *The Way of All Flesh*, pp. xiv–xvi.

<sup>3</sup> *The Correspondence of Samuel Butler with his Sister May*, ed. by Daniel F. Howard (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1962), pp. 160–62 (pp. 161–62) (3 June 1886).

<sup>4</sup> *Shrewsbury Edition*, ed. by Jones and Bartholomew, XII: *The Authoress of the Odyssey*, 6. Further references to this volume are given after quotations in the text and prefixed *AO*.

of the *Iliad* (1898) and the *Odyssey* (1900), together with *The Authoress of the Odyssey* (1897). In the latter, Butler argues that the *Odyssey* had been written by a young Sicilian woman, who had included herself in the work as Nausicaa, the daughter of the King of Phaeacia. Both of these major projects reflect Butler's obsession with recovering, reconstructing, and making public the lives of those he believed worthy of public esteem. Additionally, in the case of the *Authoress*, and in keeping with his evolutionary works and meticulous connoisseurial works of art criticism, he insists on what he believes to be the correct attribution of author to text.

The third major project was another biographical construction: that of his own posthumous life. In the last few years before his death Butler edited his notebooks and produced detailed indices for each, as well as sorting and annotating his correspondence. In the introduction to his grandfather's *Life and Letters*, he writes of 'the foresight displayed by Dr. Butler in preserving so many, not only of the letters he received, but of the drafts of those he wrote to other people' (*LL*, I, pp. xxix–xxx). It is such foresight that has allowed Butler to reconstruct his grandfather's life, and he bemoans the fact that other prominent educationalists did not act similarly. The *Life and Letters* has been written 'as much in the hope of interesting Shrewsbury men two hundred years hence, as for those of the present generation' (*LL*, I, p. xxx). In the ordering of his own literary affairs ahead of his death, Butler clearly hopes that he, too, will achieve the posthumous fame he has conferred upon his grandfather. Tim Whitmarsh describes this 'obsession with literary self-fashioning' as 'control freakery, vanity and/or artful manipulation'.<sup>5</sup> Even if one grants this, Butler's obsession with his own posthumous fame is, as already demonstrated, entirely consistent with his obsession to recuperate the reputations of several other artistic, literary, and scientific figures, whose works he believed to have been unfairly neglected. Unless one reads these latter attempts as extended and elaborate subterfuges to mask or justify the real motive of his self-obsession, there must be a more general underlying cause than mere 'control freakery' or 'vanity'. Part of the answer, I suggest, is to be found in the reconstruction of his grandfather's life, and in the hereditary relationship between this life and his own. In order to ground his own posthumous reputation on as respectable a basis as possible, it was necessary to provide evidence of his own good breeding. This entailed the *Life and Letters*, Butler's judicious selection of and commentary on his grandfather's

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<sup>5</sup> Tim Whitmarsh, 'What Samuel Butler Saw: Classics, Authorship and Cultural Authority in Late Victorian England', *Proceedings of the Cambridge Philological Society*, 48 (2002), 66–86 (p. 69).

correspondence, and which was a rewriting of the earlier fictional relationship between Ernest Pontifex and his father and grandfather in *The Way of All Flesh*.

Butler started writing the memoir of his grandfather in 1889, but it soon lengthened into a two-volume *Life and Letters*, which was published by John Murray in 1896, albeit at Butler's expense, seven years before the less-than-flattering *The Way of All Flesh*. In the preface, he describes explicitly how he has indelibly and textually fashioned his grandfather's reputation: 'I [...] destroyed, with the approval of the authorities of the British Museum [...], any letters the preservation of which might cause pain without serving any useful purpose' (*LL*, I, p. xiii). As has been described in Chapter 2, Butler was disgusted that Darwin had not given Erasmus Darwin, his own grandfather, the recognition Butler felt due. It is tempting to read the *Life and Letters* as his hagiographic riposte to Charles, as an exemplum of how to repay the debt to one's forebears. However, given that the writing of the *Life and Letters* is as much an autobiography of his own prehistory as it is a biography of his grandfather, I suggest that several of the episodes and portrayals of character he chooses to include are intended to justify or provide hereditary precedents for similar episodes in his own.

Butler seems particularly keen to demonstrate his grandfather's avoidance of zealous extremes of view in order to sanction his own general maxim of moderation, *surtout point de zèle*, and, more specifically, his own latitudinarian theology. In an anti-Evangelical address Dr Butler gave in 1829, he aligns himself with those

many truly pious and good men and sincere Christians, whose feelings are yet sobered down by their judgement, who believe that zeal should ever be tempered by discretion, and that the passions are bad and even dangerous guides in spiritual as well as temporal concerns. (*LL*, I, 428)

In order to demonstrate that it is possible to serve both God and Mammon, and possibly to adumbrate his own financial success in New Zealand, Butler shows just how profitable Shrewsbury School was under Dr Butler's headship (*LL*, II, 151–56). He also includes many letters in which his grandfather urges for a fair salary for the clergy, and especially for an increase in the salary for those at the lower end of the scale, often with large families to support.<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, in one of his sermons, Dr Butler again expresses his anti-Evangelicalism, and his belief that man should follow his desires and enjoy pleasure: '[man's] desires [...] are the natural and only spurs to action' (*LL*, I, 75).

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<sup>6</sup> See, for instance, a long extract Butler reprinted from a pamphlet on 'Church Dignities', written by his grandfather, in which it is argued that the clergy should be given a comfortable temporal existence (*LL*, II, 53–56).

Notably, in the light of his grandson's later contempt for Pharisaism, he identifies Puritans as Christian Pharisees (*LL*, I, 76). These extracts Butler chooses to include can be seen as justificatory precedents for his own apparent hedonism and for his opprobrium for what he believed to be the hypocritical pleasure-denying tendencies of organized religion. Butler believed in two worlds, but he also believed that one needed to be comfortable in this one in order to be so in the one to come.<sup>7</sup> Of course, too, his grandfather's belief that desires are 'the natural and only spurs to action' could be taken directly from one of Butler's own evolutionary works. Dr Butler thereby provides a neat encapsulation of the Lamarckian origins of and justification for Butler's own mode of living.

As already noted, what Butler knew of his own family history was loosely used in that of several generations of the Pontifex family in *The Way of All Flesh*. Not surprisingly, several critics have rightly seen this novel too as incorporating Butler's Lamarckism and his theory of inherited memory.<sup>8</sup> The *Life and Letters* of his grandfather is a more favourable rewriting of one part of this history. In *The Way of All Flesh*, Butler's alter ego, Ernest Pontifex, has to struggle against the adverse hereditary and environmental effects of a culturally illiterate grandfather and a tyrannical father to secure for himself a modest existence as a man of letters. In contrast, Butler, via the rewriting of his own grandfather's life, is able to construct a more positive hereditary background on which to base his own self-fashioning. However, I suggest that *The Way of All Flesh*, the *Life and Letters*, and even the 'Memoir' that forms the first part of *The Fair Haven*, and which also includes episodes based upon Butler's known biography, should all be seen as part of the same project of constructing his own life. Given Butler's views on the continuity of trans-generational personal identity, the sedulous attention paid to his own literary remains and the construction for posterity of his grandfather's life are therefore part of a single project, namely, the begetting of his own posthumous textual life. The distinction between biography and autobiography dissolves, and the life of his grandfather is as much his own autobiography as it is a biography.

At Shrewsbury School, Butler was taught classics by Rev. Benjamin Kennedy, who had been Dr Butler's star pupil and preferred successor when Dr Butler retired in

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<sup>7</sup> Butler discusses the imperative to serve both God and Mammon in order to be comfortable in this world and the next in his notebooks (*NB*, pp. 17–18).

<sup>8</sup> See, for instance Guest, 'Acquired Characters'; and U. C. Knoepfelmacher, *Religious Humanism and the Victorian Novel: George Eliot, Walter Pater, and Samuel Butler* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1965), pp. 257–95.

1836 on his appointment as Bishop of Coventry and Lichfield.<sup>9</sup> Kennedy died in 1889, but not before Butler was able to consult him regarding his memories of Dr Butler. Butler's inheritance from his grandfather was therefore twofold. On the one hand he was the hereditary beneficiary of Dr Butler's memories; on the other, he acquired his proficiency in Latin and Greek, as well as more general moral qualities, indirectly from him via Kennedy, his grandfather's immediate pedagogical descendant. Butler asks, 'could Dr. Kennedy have done what he did if he had been at any other school than one in which the spirit infused by Dr. Butler was still living?' (*LL*, II, 198). Moreover,

If I were asked what I flattered myself upon as being the pre-eminent virtues of Shrewsbury, I should say sincerity, downrightness, hatred of sham, love of work, and a strong sense of duty. What little of these noble qualities I dare pretend to, I owe hardly more to my parents than to the school at which they placed me, nor do I believe that Shrewsbury would have possessed them in the measure in which they certainly existed among my own schoolfellows but for the deep impress of Dr. Butler's masculine and sagacious character. That the impress has not been dimmed by those who have succeeded him is my firm and comfortable belief. (*LL*, II, 199)

Both inherited memory and the Lamarckian effects of the Shrewsbury School environment therefore played a part in instilling in Butler those moral qualities he prized most highly, as well as engendering his interest in the works of Homer.

### ***The Authoress of the Odyssey***

In the most recent consideration of the *Authoress*, Mary Beard notes that the text is so interesting because it has retained its currency even though its main claim, that the *Odyssey* was written by a young Sicilian woman, is almost universally rejected. Negatively, Butler is held up as a model of how *not* to read Homer.<sup>10</sup> But, more positively, the debates about authorship continue today, and Butler has become the beneficiary of the shift towards gender studies within classical scholarship (Beard, pp. 335, 336). Forty years earlier than Beard, David Grene was more generous. In the introduction to his edition of the *Authoress*, he notes that two out of the three claims Butler made have since been accepted: that the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* were written by

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<sup>9</sup> See *LL*, II, 161–63 for Dr Butler's letter of recommendation to the Master and Fellows of St John's College, in whose gift the headship of Shrewsbury was held. Kennedy was also a member of the New Testament Revision Company, active between 1870 and 1881, the aim of which was to produce a new version of the New Testament to reflect recent biblical scholarship (see Chapter 3).

<sup>10</sup> Mary Beard, 'Why Homer Was (Not) a Woman: The Reception of *The Authoress of the Odyssey*', in *Victorian Against the Grain*, ed. by Paradis, pp. 317–42 (p. 335).

different authors, and that the *Odyssey* was written later than the *Iliad*. Only his claim that it had been written by a young Sicilian woman has been rejected.<sup>11</sup> It is this last claim that, according to Elinor Shaffer, has ‘excluded [Butler] from the circle of reputable critics of Homer’ (*Erewhons of the Eye*, p. 168). The philologist Andrew Dalby suggests that both the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* were written by a woman, but is peremptorily dismissed by Beard in an endnote. Noting that Dalby is not a Homerist, Donald Lateiner concludes that Dalby’s book should be used by undergraduates with caution. Oliver Taplin rejects Butler’s claim, regretfully, perhaps: ‘I find Samuel Butler’s case for an authoress of the *Odyssey* unconvincing — unfortunately. On the whole the women serve the gratification of Odysseus.’ Perhaps mocking the implied absurdity of Butler’s essentialist argument, Taplin remarks that ‘if either Homeric poem were to be by a woman it would be the *Iliad*, with its keen awareness of the victims of war’. However much Butler’s work on the *Odyssey* has been dismissed or mocked within academia, it nevertheless proved influential in the writing of James Joyce’s *Ulysses*. Timo Müller has recently argued that Joyce drew on Butler’s *The Authoress of the Odyssey* to a much greater extent than has been suspected.<sup>12</sup> Moreover, Joyce did not read Greek, and he used Butler’s translation of the *Odyssey*, written in ‘Tottenham Court Road’ rather than the ‘Wardour Street English’ of Butcher’s and Lang’s famous translation of 1879.<sup>13</sup>

As interesting as these academic debates are, however, regarding the merits or otherwise of Butler’s claim, there was far more at stake than the question of female authorship. I shall consider the *Authoress* as an illustration, and an attempted resolution, of, on the one hand, the tension in Butler’s thought between cultural tradition and innovation; and, on the other, of his belief that cultural progress results from the vigorous public interchange of competing ideas. In other words, the *Authoress* offers a critique of the means by which an idea, however erroneous, becomes fixed over centuries of scholarship, and of how this may be avoided. Employing the Lamarckian

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<sup>11</sup> Samuel Butler, *The Authoress of the Odyssey*, intr. by David Grene (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967), p. vii.

<sup>12</sup> Andrew Dalby, *Rediscovering Homer: Inside the Origins of the Epic* (New York: Norton, 2006), pp. 139–53; Beard, p. 341, n. 46; Donald Lateiner, Review of Andrew Dalby, *Rediscovering Homer: Inside the Origins of the Epic*, *Historian*, 69 (2007), 819–20 (p. 820); Oliver Taplin, *Homeric Soundings: The Shaping of the Iliad* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), p. 32, n. 35; Timo Müller, ‘Gerty MacDowell, Poetess: Butler’s *The Authoress of the Odyssey* and the Nausicaa Episode of *Ulysses*’, *Twentieth-Century Literature*, 55 (2009), 378–92 (p. 380).

<sup>13</sup> Hugh Kenner, ‘Homer’s Sticks and Stones’, *James Joyce Quarterly*, 6 (1969), 285–98 (pp. 286–87, 296). Butler’s translation was in a notoriously demotic prose style, in contrast to the pseudo-archaic style of Butcher’s and Lang’s translation of 1879, symbolized by the theatrical costumiers to be found at the time on Wardour Street. See Philip Henderson, *Samuel Butler: The Incarnate Bachelor* (London: Cohen & West, 1953), p. 167.

idea of use-inheritance, Butler makes an analogy between the development of a bodily organ through action, and the development of a thought through expression. Thoughts only develop by being expressed. It was the perceived reluctance of his contemporaries to express strong opinions that contributed to the sterility of thought:

Nothing conduces to indolence and timidity of thought like indolence and timidity of expression. Expression is to the mind what action is to the bodily organ, and he who would be vigorous in thought must be prompt and fearless in expression also, for expression helps to model the thought itself that is to be expressed. (*LL*, II, 443)

One can thus identify a concern in his evolutionary works similar to that in the *Authoress*. Butler believed that professionals in both fields ignored his ideas in order to stifle intellectual progress and protect the vested interests of men of science and academic classicists. And one can also understand why he was so aggrieved that Darwin and his circle of advisors chose not to enter into public dialogue in response to his accusatory letter to the *Athenaeum* regarding Krause's biography of Erasmus Darwin. To this critique he brings to bear the whole armoury of his evolutionary thought. When Butler asks, in the opening pages of the *Authoress*, 'How can I expect Homeric scholars to tolerate theories so subversive of all that most of them have been insisting on for so many years?', his own evolutionary theories, as outlined twenty years earlier in *Life and Habit*, supply the answer (*AO*, p. 3). If ideas 'are too new, and too little led up to, so that we find them too strange [...] then they put us out'.<sup>14</sup> His idea of female authorship was too strange to effect a fertile cross with existing ideas regarding Homer. Massed against him are the forces of two thousand five hundred years of tradition, embodied in academic interests and the commercial interests of those who make money from writing textbooks (*AO*, p. 3).

But this begs another question. Butler was a self-confessed conservative politically and emotionally, who believed that good breeding over many generations develops a moral and physical ideal, embodied in the figure of Towneley, for instance, in *The Way of All Flesh*. Towneley is the most popular student at Cambridge, and, for Ernest Pontifex, 'is my notion of everything which I should most like to be' (*WF*, p. 382). Ernest thought of himself as the sort of man 'through whom conscious knowledge must

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<sup>14</sup> *LH*, p. 135. This idea has its antecedent in a letter of Dr Butler's in which he is discussing some of the dangers of educating the poorer classes: '[Men of cultivated minds] seem to forget that the progress of all real knowledge is gradual, and sometimes almost imperceptible; that the preparatory steps to it are tedious and difficult; and that to plunge the uninstructed into science without due and early elementary preparation will be only to perplex and astound, not to instruct and edify them' (*LL*, I, 369).



pass before it can reach those who can apply it gracefully and instinctively as the Towneleys can' (p. 352). But as has been demonstrated by his dismissal of two thousand five hundred years of Homeric scholarship, tradition is not always the best arbiter of truth or ideality. In evolutionary terms, the persistence of an erroneous idea within Homeric authorship, in preference to his alternative, is not the survival of the fittest. In the terms of *The Way of All Flesh*, Ernests have persisted, despite allegedly poor breeding, alongside the Towneleys. The question remains, therefore, why are some traditions worth upholding, whereas others are not? How is it possible that over two millennia of Homeric tradition are fundamentally wrong?

The answer may be found by recognizing the parallels between Butler's biblical criticism and his work on the *Odyssey*. According to Butler, both were based upon fundamentally false premises, namely, the account of the Resurrection, and the attribution to the *Odyssey* of Homer; and both these false premises had been perpetuated by theologians and scholars for centuries, for what Butler deemed to be professional ends. He makes this correspondence explicit:

A people who could [lose sight of the impossibility of the *Odyssey* having been written by Homer] [...] were not likely to know more about the difference underlying the [*Iliad* and *Odyssey*] than the average English layman does about those between the synoptic gospels and that of St. John. (AO, p. 237)

When this argument is extended to the art academies, it is evident that tradition perpetuated via professional and academic institutions, and accepted without question by generations of acolytes, is, in Butler's view, ripe for debunking. Just like sham art, sham ideas arise as the result of impure motives. In Lamarckian use-inheritance terms, the sham ideas have been sheltered within the safe environment of the academy for generations, protected from competing claims. Their capacity to develop in response to such has thus atrophied.

This is not to say that Butler supported all radical attempts to dismantle erroneous traditions. Before Butler's own assault on professional Homeric scholarship, Friedrich Wolf (1759–1824) had drawn upon methods employed in German biblical criticism and constructed a Homer figure that was 'nobody in particular but rather an editorial committee assembling scraps uniform in style but of miscellaneous authorship' (Kenner, p. 287). Wolf published his *Prolegomena ad Homerum* in 1795, and his theory was based upon the external evidence that writing was unknown in Homer's time, and that the poems as we know them now were not written down until several centuries after Homer's death. Despite the fact that it was far from clear that writing was unavailable at

the time it was supposed the poems were composed, Wolf's theory was still widely accepted at the end of the nineteenth century.<sup>15</sup> Butler addresses the 'Wolfian heresy' in the opening pages of the *Authoress* (p. 2). I would argue, in fact, that his claim that the *Odyssey* was the product of a single mind was more important than his specific assertion that this mind belonged to a young Sicilian woman. If he could demonstrate the latter, the former necessarily followed, 'for there can hardly have been more than one woman in the same place able to write such — and such homogeneous — poetry as we find throughout the *Odyssey*' (*AO*, p. 1).

Butler's opening refutation of Wolf is based upon historical precedent, which, following the later work of Milman Parry on the oral formulaic composition of South Slavic poetry, has been shown to be false. He writes that 'literature furnishes us with no poem whose genesis is known to have been such as that which we are asked to foist upon the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*' (*AO*, p. 2). However, as Parry shows, there is no *a priori* reason why poems as long as the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* should not be passed down within a long oral tradition before being fixed in writing at some later date. The idea that they are the creation of a single mind is therefore meaningless.<sup>16</sup> Given this, Robert Fowler states that 'it is retrograde to argue that we can go on reading [Homer] like Virgil or Shakespeare' (Fowler, p. 222). But this is exactly what Butler does argue, and is why he was keen to attack Wolf's theory of a non-unitary Homer. At stake is not just the authorship of classical epic but also the idea that literary and art works in general are the products of unique expressive minds embodied in discreet individuals existing at a specific time and place: 'Who would have thought of attacking Shakespeare's existence — for if Shakespeare did not write his plays he is no longer Shakespeare — unless men's minds had been unsettled by Wolf's virtual denial of Homer's?' (*AO*, p. 2). Butler is alluding to the topical question of the authorship of Shakespeare's plays, and to the conjecture that they had been written by Francis Bacon.<sup>17</sup> Such a view anticipates Michel Foucault's assertion that 'if we proved that Shakespeare did not write those sonnets which pass for his, that would constitute a significant change and affect the

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<sup>15</sup> R. C. Jebb, *Homer: An Introduction to the Iliad and the Odyssey*, 3rd edn (Glasgow: Maclehose, 1888), pp. 110–11.

<sup>16</sup> Robert Fowler, 'The Homeric Question', in *The Cambridge Companion to Homer*, ed. by Robert Fowler (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 220–32 (pp. 221–22).

<sup>17</sup> Ignatius Donnelly had published *The Great Cryptogram* in 1888 in which he proposed a Baconian authorship of the plays. This spawned parodic articles such as one proposing that Dickens's novels had been written by Gladstone. See 'Who Wrote Dickens's Novels?', *Cornhill Magazine*, August 1888, pp. 113–21.

manner in which the author's name functions'.<sup>18</sup> For Butler, Shakespeare and his sonnets, or Homer and the *Iliad*, if not the *Odyssey*, are indissolubly bound in a harmonic whole. The text is the posthumous extension of the life of the author, and through which he or she continues to exist. Butler goes on to ask:

Who would have reascribed picture after picture in half the galleries of Europe, often wantonly, and sometimes in defiance of the clearest evidence, if the unsettling of questions concerning authorship had not been found to be an easy road to reputation as a critic? (*AO*, p. 2)

Unspoken here is Butler's belief that a critic's reputation is in the gift of the professional class to which they belong, in this case the Oxbridge classical establishment; and he associates such a reputation with the dismantling of traditional links between author and text. This, of course, is ironic, given that, in positing a female author of the *Odyssey*, he was doing just that, albeit without the associated benefit of winning repute. Butler's conception of authorship is deeply dependent upon his paradoxical idea of personal identity, so before continuing the discussion of the *Authoress* it will be useful to recapitulate this.

At the beginning of the four chapters of *Life and Habit* in which Butler considers the nature of personal identity, he draws attention to this paradox:

We regard our personality as a simple definite whole; as a plain, palpable, individual thing, which can be seen going about the streets or sitting indoors at home; as something which lasts us our lifetime, and about the confines of which no doubt can exist in the minds of reasonable people. But in truth this 'we,' which looks so simple and definite, is a nebulous and indefinable aggregation of many component parts which war not a little among themselves [...]. Moreover, as the component parts of our identity change from moment to moment, our personality becomes a thing dependent upon time present, which has no logical existence [...]. And not only is our personality as fleeting as the present moment, but the parts which compose it blend some of them so imperceptibly into [...] outside things which clearly form no part of our personality, that when we try to bring ourselves to book, and to determine wherein we consist, or draw a line where we begin or end, we find ourselves baffled. There is nothing but fusion and confusion. (p. 64)

In this passage Butler is highlighting the tension between the commonsensical view of personal identity, and a philosophical or logical view, the latter leading to apparent absurdity. Indeed, he later notes that 'common parlance [...] settles the difficulty readily enough [...] by the simple process of ignoring it' (*LH*, p. 66). Usually, whenever there is a disjunction between common sense and logic, Butler will side with the former.

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<sup>18</sup> 'What is an Author?', in *The Foucault Reader*, ed. by Paul Rabinow (London: Penguin, 1991), pp. 101–20 (p. 106).

However, in this case, and maybe illustrating the need to be inconsistently consistent, he goes on to elaborate and argue for the philosophical view of personal identity which would result in the central claim of *Life and Habit*, that memory is inherited.

Butler's conception of personal identity has caused some confusion amongst critics. Sally Shuttleworth has argued that 'in his reconstruction of notions of personal identity, Butler breaks down all the binaries that define Western ideas of selfhood: life/death; mind/body; internal/external; past/present'. She goes on to ask, 'what does the act of will, or the experience of consciousness, mean if it cannot be understood with reference to an individual life?'<sup>19</sup> However, this seems to be a misreading of Butler's position. Several times in *Life and Habit* he states that all life is descended from 'the primordial cell (whatever this may be)' (p. 61). This being so, it does not follow that every individual carries the same ancestral memories, for the simple reason that each individual (actually, each set of siblings), has descended from the primordial cell by a completely unique path, and thus carries a unique albeit composite ancestral memory: the 'nebulous and indefinable aggregation of many component parts which war not a little among themselves'. Butler, in fact, implies that this is a consequence of the fecundity of reproduction: 'If the primordial cell had been only capable of reproducing itself once, there would have followed a single line of descendants'. However, since the primordial cell was capable of reproducing itself 'many times over', the result has been 'the existing divergence of type' (*LH*, p. 214).

Robert Macfarlane appears guilty of a similar misapprehension. He writes that 'according to Butler's vision of mentality, the individual mind was an illusion, for "every individual person is a compound creature."' It was but a short step from this position to disavowing entirely the concept of thought-ownership' (Macfarlane, p. 69). However, this being the case, one therefore needs to explain Butler's obsession with 'thought-ownership', with the attribution of an idea, or a literary or artistic work, to what he believed to be its rightful owner. If our memories are inherited, how is it possible to determine whence a theory was originated, and how does one attribute an artwork to a discreet artist? This is even more pertinent in the case of Charles Darwin, separated by only one generation from his grandfather Erasmus, from whom Butler believed Charles's theory was appropriated without acknowledgement. It is the entrenchment of the idea of thought-ownership throughout his works, rather than its disavowal that

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<sup>19</sup> Sally Shuttleworth, 'Evolutionary Psychology and *The Way of All Flesh*', in *Victorian Against the Grain*, ed. by Paradis, pp. 143–69 (pp. 147, 148).

needs explaining; or rather, how can a reconciliation be effected between his insistence on correct attribution and his notion of the compound nature of personal identity? Macfarlane points out that towards the end of the nineteenth century, there was an erosion of the ‘cultural mythology of singular authorship’, together with an increase in the acknowledgement ‘of the socialized nature of invention, literary and otherwise’ (p. 74). Nevertheless, it was during this very period that Butler himself was working to refute the ‘Wolfian heresy’ of the *Odyssey*’s multiple authorship. There is a great difference between multiple authorship and the creation of the *Odyssey* by one individual genius, albeit one whose mind was compounded of the accumulated memories, instincts, and habits of countless generations. For Butler, it was inconceivable that such a homogeneous work as the *Odyssey* could be the product of multiple minds each of which had evolved via very different paths from the primordial cell, and had therefore accumulated very different qualities along the way.

According to modern critics, the fundamental flaws in Butler’s mode of argument in the *Authoress* are his essentialist ideas of gender and his presentism. John Winkler writes that ‘Butler reads the *Odyssey* as if [it] were an English novel of manners’, and he assumes ‘that well-bred men and women on the Greek island of Ithaka in the time of the Trojan War or during the Greek dark age would have behaved like ladies and gentlemen of his own time and class’.<sup>20</sup> Mary Beard concludes that ‘Butler’s arguments are now more likely to be found useful in teaching as an object lesson in how not to project anachronistic assumptions of female and male behaviour back into the classical past’ (Beard, p. 337). Of course, we also know, post-Wayne Booth, that we should not confuse the historical author with the implied author. One of the consequences of Butler’s theory of personal identity and its extension into ‘extracorporaneous’ materials such as texts is that it seems almost impossible for him not to conflate the implied author and the historical. The ‘governing consciousness’ of a text, in Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan’s phrase, is, for Butler, the spirit of the historical author, immanent within the text.<sup>21</sup> All texts are therefore in some sense autobiographical. The idea that they could be mere literary creations, projecting a consciousness existing independently from the creating mind was absurd. The music of

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<sup>20</sup> John J. Winkler, *The Constraints of Desire: The Anthropology of Sex and Gender in Ancient Greece* (New York: Routledge, 1990), pp. 130, 132.

<sup>21</sup> Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction*, 2nd edn (London: Routledge, 2002), p. 87.

Handel, the paintings of Bellini, and the *Odyssey* were not to be enjoyed for their own sakes, but as an embodiment and revivification of the spirit of their long-dead creators.

Throughout his writings, Butler openly privileged the world that was known to him, the here and now of late-Victorian England, as a window on the past or on the unknown. However much he may have despised the men of science and their alleged hypocrisy, he does nevertheless apply their inductive method of reasoning. He argues by analogy from the known late nineteenth-century world to the unknown world of the time in which the *Odyssey* was first written down, and however much one may dismiss the analogy made between man and machines in his early Christchurch *Press* articles that became incorporated into the ‘Book of the Machines’, he was, I have suggested, very serious. Darwin begins the *Origin* with an account of artificial selection in order to make an analogy with natural selection; for Butler, the current and observable evolution of man via technology was the best guide to our understanding of the evolution of all organic life:

I would [...] strongly advise the reader to use man, and the present races of man, and the growing inventions and conceptions of man, as his guide, if he would seek to form an independent judgment on the development of organic life. (*LH*, p. 209)

Similarly, readers of the *Odyssey* seeking ‘an independent judgment’, rather than relying merely upon Homeric scholarship, are explicitly advised to apply those contemporary mores with which they are familiar. In ‘The Humour of Homer’ (1892), in which he specifically discusses the Homer of the *Iliad*, he writes that

[Homer] was after all only a literary man, and those who occupy themselves with letters must approach him as a very honoured member of their own fraternity, but still as one who must have felt, thought, and acted much as themselves [...]. If we would read his lines intelligently we must also read between them.<sup>22</sup>

Implicit in this passage is the understanding that there is an unchanging and universal essence of ‘literary man’ stretching, in apostolic succession, from the Homer of the *Iliad*, to late nineteenth-century critics, through which this Homer figure can be read. However, this entails being as attentive to the spirit as to the letter of the text: ‘not to read between the lines, not to try and detect the hidden features of the writer [...] is to be a dull, unsympathetic, incurious reader’ (*HH*, p. 240).

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<sup>22</sup> ‘The Humour of Homer’, in *Shrewsbury Edition*, ed. by Jones and Bartholomew, XIX: *Collected Essays*, vol. 2, 237–71 (p. 240). Further references to this essay are given after quotations in the text and prefixed HH.

Applying such an approach to the *Odyssey* leads Butler ineluctably to the conclusion that it was written by a woman. His starting point, however, is based upon external evidence rather than the internal evidence of the text. He asserts the then commonly held view that the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* ‘belong to ages separated from one another by some generations’ (*AO*, p. 5). Different authors must therefore have composed them, which ‘was prominently insisted on by many people more than two thousand years ago’ (p. 5). This view, however, was unacknowledged by generations of Homeric scholars until the end of the eighteenth century. In keeping with his project of doing justice to his grandfather, whilst, moreover, also forging a hereditary memic correspondence with him, he notes that Dr Butler accepted that the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* have different authors.<sup>23</sup> From this it follows that if Homer did not write the *Odyssey*, it must be an anonymous work, and as Jones argues in his preface to the Shrewsbury Edition of the *Authoress*, ‘one cannot approach an anonymous work as one approaches a second work by an already well-known author’ (*AO*, p. xxix). Therefore, if Homer did not write the *Odyssey*, there is no *prima facie* evidence that it was not written by a woman.

Butler was writing from experience. As already noted, in the preface to the second edition of *The Fair Haven* he disclosed his authorship, and offered an explanation for the pseudonymous first edition: ‘if I had been suspected of satire once [in *Erewhon*], I might be suspected again with no greater reason’ (*FH*, p. xviii). The example of *The Fair Haven*, however, illustrates another paradox of authorial attribution in Butler’s work. If, as Butler was at pains to emphasize, the artwork is the embodiment of the mind of its creator, how should we read texts such as *The Fair Haven* in which Butler was able to ‘hoodwink’, to use a Butlerism, most of his readers? Is this a textual manifestation of the insincerity of the author? If, for Butler, the unified, expressive authorial subject is at the centre of literary creation, what do we make of his various authorial identities? And how should we read his very self-conscious construction of a posthumous authorial identity? Is this as much a fiction as his earlier identities, as Whitmarsh has suggested? (Whitmarsh, p. 69). The argument becomes circular, and we are in danger of becoming

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<sup>23</sup> *AO*, p. 273. Butler may be stretching a point here. In *A Sketch of Antient Geography* (1813), Dr Butler wrote that ‘the uniformity of plan and diction convinces me that the *Iliad*, with possibly some exceptions, was the work of one man. The *Odyssey* is *perhaps* attributable to a different hand, and to a somewhat later, but very early age.’ See Samuel Butler, *A Sketch of Antient Geography for the Use of Schools*, rev. by the Rev. Thomas Butler, New edn (London: Longman, Brown, Green, and Longmans, 1855), pp. 134–35, emphasis in original.

entangled in an irresolvable chicken-and-egg situation, as Susan Lanser has noted.<sup>24</sup> We interpret a work in the light of what is known of its creator, whose qualities in turn have been inferred by a consideration of their previous creations. However, this tension between creator and work is resolved in a monistic, albeit peculiarly Butlerian, fashion by harmonizing the distinction between the two, as he did between life and death, organic and inorganic, mind and body, and faith and reason. If we view creator and work as two sides of the same coin we can begin to understand Butler's idea of authorship. Such an intimate relationship is embodied in the two elements of the 'Life and Letters' genre to which Butler himself contributed. Moreover, he often wrote of the 'life' of an artwork or text, especially in respect of a long-dead author, and posthumous life was manifested in the living text:

If the *Odyssey* enforces one artistic truth more than another, it is that living permanent work in literature (and the same holds good for art and music) can only be done by those who are either above, or below, conscious reference to any rules or canons whatsoever [...]. For after all it is not the outward and visible signs of what we read, see, or hear, in any work, that bring us to its feet in prostration of gratitude and affection; what really stirs us is the communion with the still living mind of the man or woman to whom we owe it, and the conviction that that mind is as we would have our own to be. All else is mere clothes and grammar. (*AO*, pp. 278–79)

Returning to the *Odyssey*, if this was written several generations after the *Iliad*, it must be anonymous. Given the unchanging and universal essence of 'literary man', and in a move that, according to his twenty-first century critics, invalidates Butler's whole argument, he applies to it the same methods of literary criticism as one would use on an anonymous nineteenth-century novel. He notes that reviewers are adept at discovering the true gender of the author of anonymous literary works, and that

if the *Odyssey* were to appear anonymously for the first time now, and to be sent round to the papers for review, there is not even a professional critic who would not see that it is a woman's writing and not a man's.<sup>25</sup>

Although there are no *a priori* reasons why a woman could not have written the *Odyssey*, there is little external evidence in its favour, and so Butler has to rely on the internal evidence of the text itself. For him,

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<sup>24</sup> Susan S. Lanser, 'The Author's Queer Clothes: Anonymity, Sex(uality), and *The Travels and Adventures of Mademoiselle de Richelieu*', in *The Faces of Anonymity: Anonymous and Pseudonymous Publication from the Sixteenth to the Twentieth Century*, ed. by Robert J. Griffin (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), pp. 81–102 (p. 82).

<sup>25</sup> 'Was the *Odyssey* Written by a Woman?', in *Shrewsbury Edition*, ed. by Jones and Bartholomew, XIX: *Collected Essays*, vol. 2, 273–306 (p. 303). Further references to this essay are given after quotations in the text and prefixed *WOW*; *HH*, p. 255.



the most unerring test of female authorship [is] surely a preponderance of female interest, and a fuller knowledge of those things which a woman naturally knows [...]. People always write by preference of what they know best [...]. This extends itself to ways of thought even more than to mere material actions. (*WOW*, p. 279)

As one would expect, Butler has meticulously read the *Odyssey* and adduces several chapters of evidence to substantiate his claim (*AO*, pp. 109–65). He argues that

a woman if she attempts an Epic is almost compelled to have a man for her central figure, but she will minimize him, and will maximize his wife and daughters, drawing them with subtler hand. That the writer of the *Odyssey* has done this is obvious. (*AO*, p. 119)

In his discussion of the massacre of Penelope's suitors on Odysseus's return, Butler recalls a conversation with a man who thought his theory absurd, 'for the first thing a woman would have thought of after the suitors had been killed was the dining-room carpet. I said that *mutatis mutandis* this was the very first thing she did think of.' (*AO*, p. 123) In Butler's own prose translation of the *Odyssey*, he describes the aftermath of the massacre thus:

When [the women had carried the bodies out], they cleaned all the tables and seats with sponges and water, while Telemachus and the two others shovelled up the blood and dirt from the ground, and the women carried it all away and put it out of doors.<sup>26</sup>

In so positing a female authorship of the *Odyssey*, Butler is deliberately provoking a struggle for existence between two competing theories. However, as in his earlier engagement with Darwin and his allies over the Krause biography of Erasmus Darwin, his opponents failed to respond, so the putative struggle was stillborn. The publication of the *Origin of Species* had taught him that the cultural evolution of ideas could proceed at a far more rapid rate than the natural evolution of biological traits, if not than the breeding of domestic species via artificial selection in which evolutionary time is similarly attenuated. There was a crucial difference, however, between his evolutionary works and the *Authoress*: the former attacked a theory that had been revolutionary within his own lifetime, and which had rapidly attained a wide acceptance; the latter attacked a theory — Homer's authorship of the *Odyssey* — that was, according to Butler, over two thousand years old. If we are to believe the final paragraph of the *Authoress*, Butler's only intention is to have his own theory carefully considered in his favoured court of appeal, that of 'sensible men':

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<sup>26</sup> *Shrewsbury Edition*, ed. by Jones and Bartholomew, XV: *The Odyssey Rendered into English Prose*, 346.

What can it matter to me [...] whether it was written by a man or a woman? From the bottom of my heart I can say truly that I do not care about the way in which these points are decided, but I do care, and very greatly, about knowing which way they are decided by sensible people who have considered what I have urged in this book. (40, p. 281)

The struggle for existence amongst ideas takes place before a jury of common men, untainted by the insincerity and self-deception perpetuated by generations of Homeric scholars. Rather, these sensible people are the beneficiaries of generations of sincere reflection on practical problems by their ancestors, such that they are now able instinctively to make the correct judgment.

Although Butler obviously admires the *Odyssey* and its authoress, he is also aware of its technical imperfections, such as the inept incorporation of certain episodes within it. But, as with some of his favourite works of art, these imperfections enhance rather than detract from his aesthetic appreciation. It is the spirit of its creator embodied within the work, rather than the technical skill with which the work was executed that Butler privileges. In respect of his favourite novelists and artists, he feels that genius is marked by the continuous improvement over the life of the artist, a consequence of his Lamarckian aesthetics. For an artist such as the authoress of the *Odyssey*, for whom we have only one known extant work, it is obviously not possible to trace the artistic development over her working life. Nevertheless, Butler believes that the technical imperfections apparent in the work betray her youth. In particular, he notes, along with other commentators, that the *Odyssey* appears to have been constructed from material from several earlier periods, and that it is possible to observe the vestiges of its creation (40, p. 263). He goes on to point out how little modification was needed to conceal these, but that, nevertheless, ‘we learn far more about [the authoress] than we should do if she had made her work go more perfectly upon all fours, and it is herself that we value even more than her poem’ (40, p. 267). He compares her method of composition with his own:

I know how my own books, especially the earlier ones, got cut about, rearranged, altered in scheme, and cobbled to hide alteration, so that I never fairly knew what my scheme was till the book was three-quarters done, and I credit young writers generally with a like tentativeness. (40, p. 269)

For Butler, the two main divisions of the poem are ‘the Phaeacian episode with the Return of Ulysses, and the story of Penelope and the suitors’, and he attempts, inconclusively, to discover the order in which the books were written (40, p. 272). As I

go on to demonstrate, therefore, his project in the *Authoress* is similar to that in *Shakespeare's Sonnets Reconsidered*. However, in the *Authoress*, the identity of the author is far more important than the order in which the work was originally written and the manner in which the various components were imperfectly assembled. In contrast, the assembly of the one hundred and fifty-four sonnets into a coherent narrative in *Shakespeare's Sonnets Reconsidered* assumes a central importance in Butler's own portrait of Shakespeare as a young man.

### ***Shakespeare's Sonnets Reconsidered***

In the preface to the first edition of *Shakespeare's Sonnets Reconsidered*, Butler notes that his *modus operandi* will be similar to that employed in what he believes to be his success in discovering the true author of the *Odyssey*, namely, 'the simple method of studying text much and commentators little'.<sup>27</sup> Given the intimate relationship between text and author, he is therefore, clearly distinguishing between the critical function of commentators and the creative, expressive function of the author. However, rather than being a quest in search of the author, as was undertaken in the *Authoress*, his twin proximate aims in *Shakespeare's Sonnets* are to discover the identity of the dedicatee of the Quarto edition of 1609, 'Mr. W. H.', and to reorder the sonnets in such a way as to reconstruct a chronological and coherent account of a shady episode in Shakespeare's life. By so doing, he will thereby achieve his ultimate aim of demonstrating that the sonnets must have been written when Shakespeare was a very young man, in order to exculpate him from the implicit charge of sodomy, although Butler is careful never to spell this out. The age at which Shakespeare wrote the sonnets is crucial, because, as I have discussed in Chapter 4, Butler argued that all great artists improved as they age. Moreover, morality and aesthetics are two sides of the same coin, so an immoral transgression committed at a young age could not be brought to bear upon the aesthetic quality of Shakespeare's later and greater dramatic works.

Along with Homer and, latterly, the authoress of the *Odyssey*, Shakespeare was one of Butler's three literary geniuses. Given that literary genius as embodied in the text was merely a reflection of the mind of the creator, it followed that great literary works could not be created by inferior or morally tainted minds. Meaning, authorial intent,

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<sup>27</sup> *Shrewsbury Edition*, ed. by Jones and Bartholomew, XIV: *Shakespeare's Sonnets Reconsidered*, p. xvii. Further references to this volume are given after quotations in the text and prefixed SSR.

together with the moral qualities of the author are all immanent within the text itself, awaiting discovery by the sensible reader who is willing to approach the work with fresh eyes, uncontaminated by the academic prejudices of professional critics and commentators. For Butler, ‘if the Sonnets are not bones of Shakespeare they are nothing’ (*SSR*, p. 4). The image is illuminating, as it succinctly depicts the monistic nature of Butler’s thought, and his harmonizing of several of the dualities he felt obscured the truth in life, art, and evolutionary theory. Gesturing towards the science of palaeontology, Butler suggests that by careful study of the sonnets, the figure of Shakespeare can be reconstructed. But pressing the image a little further, it also implies that the sonnets themselves are in a disorderly state, and that any reconstruction of the author must be preceded by the correct ordering and articulation of the sonnets. Finally, it emphasizes what is for Butler an arbitrary distinction between life and death, which are merged within the unity of author and text. Shakespeare continues to live in his sonnets, just as the sonnets are his dead bones.

Shakespeare’s sonnets were first published in 1609 by Thomas Thorpe. This edition included the well-known dedication, added by Thorpe, and signed ‘T. T.’:

TO.THE.ONLIE.BEGETTER.OF.  
THESE.INSVING.SONNETS.  
Mr. W.H. ALL.HAPPINESSE.  
AND.THAT.ETERNITIE.  
PROMISED.  
BY.  
OVR.EVER-LIVING.POET.  
WISHETH.  
THE.WELL-WISHING.  
ADVENTVRER.IN.  
SETTING.  
FORTH.

T.T.<sup>28</sup>

The identity of ‘Mr. W.H.’ has proved contentious over centuries of Shakespearean scholarship, and Butler’s conjecture that it refers to a putative ‘William Hughes’ — a cook on the vessel *Vanguard* — who is also the addressee of most of the sonnets, is central to his reading and to the events he believes the sonnets narrate (*SSR*, p. 140). The internal evidence for this is derived from Sonnet 20, in which the addressee, ‘the

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<sup>28</sup> William Shakespeare, *The Complete Sonnets and Poems*, ed. by Colin Burrow (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 381. In order to avoid confusion resulting from Butler’s reordering and renumbering of the sonnets, all numbering in this chapter refers to the standard order as given in Burrow’s edition. Quotations, however, are taken from *SSR*.

Master-Mistress of my passion’, is described as ‘A man in hue, all *Hues* in his controlling,  
| Which steals men’s eyes and women’s souls amazeth’ (*SSR*, p. 166, emphasis in original). This theory had been first proposed by Edmond Malone in his *Poems of Shakespeare* (1780), who was himself endorsing a suggestion put to him by Thomas Tyrwhitt (*SSR*, pp. 19, 77).

At the time, there were three alternative theories of the identity of W. H. The first, promoted by William Archer, theatre critic and champion of Ibsen, was that the initials referred to William Herbert, the Earl of Pembroke (1580–1630). William and his brother, Philip, were the joint dedicatees of Shakespeare’s posthumous first folio published in 1623. Heywood Bright first put forward the theory that ‘W.H.’ refers to William Herbert in about 1819 (*SSR*, p. 70). The second theory, associated with Sidney Lee, editor of the *Dictionary of National Biography* and biographer of Shakespeare, was that the dedicatee was Henry Wriothesley, Earl of Southampton (1573–1624).<sup>29</sup> Southampton was the dedicatee of *Venus and Adonis* (1593) and *The Rape of Lucrece* (1594). However, both dedications addressed him as ‘The Right Honourable Henry Wriothesley, Earl of Southampton, and Baron of Titchfield’, and signed ‘William Shakespeare’, a very different form to the dedication prefacing the sonnets.<sup>30</sup>

For Archer, the most telling fact against the Southampton theory is that there is no evidence that the sonnets were written earlier than 1597, when Shakespeare was in his early thirties, and when Southampton was twenty-four, and therefore hardly the ‘lovely boy’ of sonnet 126 (Archer, p. 822). Against charges that it would amount almost to defamation to address Lord Pembroke as Mr W. H. Archer responds that ‘it would have been simply impossible for Thorpe openly to inscribe the Sonnets to Pembroke’ (p. 834). The three pillars of his Pembroke theory are that the young man addressed in the sonnets was of good birth and wealthy; that Shakespeare only knew three such men: Southampton, William Herbert, and his brother Philip; and that the name of the young man was Will, evidenced by the punning on this name in several of the sonnets. Lee’s refutation of Archer’s Pembroke theory is based upon the assertion that it would have been impossible for Lord Pembroke to be addressed as Mr W. H. (‘Shakespeare and the Earl of Pembroke’, p. 213). He points out that the word ‘will’ was a common pun in

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<sup>29</sup> The sonnets were very topical at the time Butler was writing *Shakespeare’s Sonnets Reconsidered*. Two recent articles had been published by Archer and Lee, setting out their respective cases: William Archer, ‘Shakespeare’s Sonnets. The Case against Southampton’, *Fortnightly Review*, December 1897, pp. 817–34; Sidney Lee, ‘Shakespeare and the Earl of Pembroke’, *Fortnightly Review*, February 1898, pp. 210–23.

<sup>30</sup> *Complete Sonnets*, ed. by Burrow, pp. 173–74, 239.

sonnets of the time, so one should not read Shakespeare's sonnets as evidence that the addressee was called Will. Lee's argument in favour of the Southampton theory, for those sonnets he believes to be autobiographical, at least, is based upon the 'one, and one only, distinctive fact which the text of the sonnets discloses' about the young man addressed, namely, that he acted as a literary patron to Shakespeare and other poets. On this basis, Southampton is the only possibility, for Pembroke would have been too young (p. 223).

From this very brief outline of the rival theories, it is apparent that two particular factors are crucial to both. First, it is necessary, by either internal or external evidence, to date the sonnets correctly. Second, it is necessary to adjudicate between literal and figurative interpretations of the words used by Shakespeare. For Butler, too, dating the sonnets as early as possible, and reading them literally and autobiographically, are crucial to his interpretation; and, more importantly, to his plea in mitigation for an unsavoury episode in Shakespeare's life he believes them to describe.

Both the Pembroke and Southampton theories allow for the possibility, if not probability, that the dedicatee is also the young man addressed in the sonnets, and therefore, that the sonnets are autobiographical. The third, 'impersonality', theory was that the sonnets were not autobiographical at all, 'merely creations of Shakespeare's fancy, having no reference to actual persons or occurrences' (*SSR*, p. 69). In his 1898 article for the *Fortnightly Review*, Lee had moved away from an unequivocal endorsement of the Southampton theory, towards the view that most of the sonnets were not in fact autobiographical. Butler finds the 'impersonality' theory the most objectionable of the three:

I credit the upholders of this theory with adopting it mainly because they hope by doing so to free Shakespeare from an odious imputation; they fail, however, to see [...] that the imputation under which they would thus leave him is far worse than any for which there is a shadow of evidence. To me it is unthinkable, and as repulsive, as I believe the reader will also find it, when he sets himself to consider what it involves. (*SSR*, p. 70)

Butler never spells out explicitly what offence Shakespeare committed, a point an exasperated Lord Alfred Douglas makes in his work on the sonnets.<sup>31</sup> Various critics have speculated that Shakespeare was tricked into seeing W. H. alone, and was seduced into undressing. At which point, as arranged, the pair were disturbed by friends of W.

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<sup>31</sup> Lord Alfred Douglas, *The True History of Shakespeare's Sonnets* (London: Secker, 1933), p. 73.

H., catching Shakespeare almost *in flagrante delicto*, and subsequently beating him.<sup>32</sup> However, Butler elaborates slightly when recounting a conversation with Frederick Furnivall, the Shakespearean scholar, just after the publication of his work: ‘I found it necessary to explain to him that my view of Shakespeare’s offence is that it never went beyond intention, and was never repeated’ (Jones, *Memoir*, II, 313). Although he does not explicitly state his reasons, I would argue that he found it less conceivable that a mind as great as Shakespeare’s was capable of imaginatively creating such a sordid episode as was implied in the sonnets than it was that the young, impressionable Shakespeare could be tricked into almost committing a homosexual act. The history of the relationship between Shakespeare and W. H., of which the episode forms part, and as reconstructed by Butler from his reading of the sonnets, can be summarized as follows.<sup>33</sup>

After being urged to marry and have children, W. H. becomes impatient, and there follows a period of time when Shakespeare and he become separated, possibly because Shakespeare is travelling with his theatre outside London. On his return, Shakespeare is the victim of an unspecified ‘cruel and most disgusting practical joke’ played on him by W. H. and others (*SSR*, p. 82). After his initial anger, Shakespeare forgives W. H. Butler then intercalates sixteen sonnets from the ‘dark lady’ sequence, in which, having failed to urge W. H. to marry, Shakespeare attempts to engineer a sexual liaison between his own mistress and W. H., which is ultimately unsuccessful for both parties. The rest of the sequence is taken up primarily by a series of charges and counter-charges of inconstancy, during which Shakespeare remonstrates with W. H. for mixing in bad company, and accuses him of preferring another poet, convinced that he is attempting to end their intimacy. The relationship becomes increasingly strained and finally ends. Butler concludes that ‘considering [...] how utterly unworthy Mr. W. H. was of the affection which Shakespeare lavished so prodigally upon him, there is nothing to regret or be surprised at in the apparent cessation of further intercourse between them’ (*SSR*, p. 99). He asks rhetorically ‘whether any other arrangement than the one we find [...] in [the 1609 edition] could be made to show anything like so coherent a story as the one indicated’ (p. 100).

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<sup>32</sup> See Muggeridge, pp. 121–22; Henderson, p. 213.

<sup>33</sup> It will be noted that, unlike most commentators, Butler does not split the sonnets into a group addressed to a beautiful youth, followed by a much shorter group addressed to a ‘dark lady’. Of this latter group, he only finds nine addressed to a woman (*SSR*, p. 78).

Several commentators have read *Shakespeare's Sonnets Reconsidered* as a writing out of Butler's own very peculiar relationship with Charles Paine Pauli, whom he met in New Zealand in the early 1860s, and with whom he returned to England in 1864.<sup>34</sup> Pauli was handsome and popular, and everything Butler wished himself to be, a model for Towneley in *The Way of All Flesh*. He died in 1897, just before Butler started work on the sonnets, lending some credence to the biographical motive. Butler believed Pauli to be perpetually short of money, and gave him several thousands of pounds during their time in London. Pauli would dine at Butler's rooms three times a week but Butler never knew where he lived. At his funeral, Butler discovered that Pauli was financially very comfortable, and, more galling, that he had been hoodwinking another man into giving him money, and of whom Butler had no knowledge at all. There are obvious parallels between the one-sided relationships between Shakespeare and W. H., and Butler and Pauli, and Butler himself alludes to one of these. Discussing Shakespeare's supposed dependence on W. H., he writes that 'indeed I have known cases in which a friend has for years held himself the vassal of another whom he believed to be absolutely dependent upon him' (*SSR*, p. 60). This is as close as Butler comes to writing his own emotional intimacy with Pauli into the work.

It may be noteworthy, however, that Jones gives a detailed, if not complete, account of the curious *dénouement* to Butler's relationship with Pauli in his *Memoir* (II, 283–87): noteworthy, because, as several critics have observed, the *Memoir* is short on the details of the homosocial domesticity of Butler's close circle. After Pauli's death, Butler describes their relationship as a 'squalid, miserable story' (quoted in *Memoir*, II, 286). However, just as we may never discover the true identity of W. H. and the nature of Shakespeare's relationship with him, so we may never discover whether Butler's intimacy with Pauli ever progressed beyond the emotional.<sup>35</sup> It is therefore more profitable to read *Shakespeare's Sonnets Reconsidered* instead as the final and clearest manifestation of Butler's theories of authorship and genius, and of his notion of the intimate relationship between aesthetics and morality, whilst allowing that it may have served personal purposes too.

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<sup>34</sup> See, for instance, Herbert Sussman, 'Samuel Butler as Late-Victorian Bachelor: Regulating and Representing the Homoerotic', in *Victorian Against the Grain*, ed. by Paradis, pp. 170–94 (pp. 185–86); and Peter Raby, *Samuel Butler: A Biography* (London: Hogarth Press, 1991), pp. 270–74.

<sup>35</sup> For a reading of the relationship that is more sympathetic to Pauli, see Ross Stuart, 'Samuel Butler and Charles Paine Pauli: A Friendship Reconsidered', *English Literature in Transition, 1880–1920*, 28 (1985), 145–61.



The motives for Butler's preference for the 'Willie Hughes' theory can be derived from what I have already argued in favour of his Lamarckian aesthetics, and of his conception of the harmonic nature of author and text. First, it was crucial to Butler's idea of the development of the artist and of his conception of genius that Shakespeare was very young when he wrote the sonnets. Second, it was necessary that the sonnet sequence was autobiographical, rather than a work of fiction.

In order to substantiate his own 'Willie Hughes' theory, at the same time as refuting the Southampton and Pembroke theories, Butler must date the sonnets as early as possible. On the basis that sonnet 127 refers to the defeat of the Spanish Armada in 1588, and that this sonnet was written more than three years after sonnet 1, he concludes that the sequence was composed between April 1585 and December 1588, when Shakespeare would have been twenty-one to twenty-four (*SSR*, pp. 131–35):

Their date is the very essence of the whole matter; for the verdict we are to pass upon some few of them — and these colour the others — depends in great measure on the age of the writer. And furthermore, what we think of Shakespeare himself must depend not a little on what we think of the Sonnets. (p. 101)

'Some few of them' refers to those which narrate the prelude to and the aftermath of the trap laid for Shakespeare. The younger Shakespeare is when the catastrophe occurred, the less he is morally culpable for the unspoken homosexual act he was apparently tricked into at least desiring. Southampton and Pembroke were born in 1573 and 1580 respectively, that is, they were some nine and sixteen years younger than Shakespeare. If either were the addressee of the sonnets, Shakespeare would have been, at best, in his late twenties when the incident occurred; at worst, in his early to mid-thirties:

Those who date the Sonnets as the Southamptonites, and still worse the Herbertites [Pembroke, William Herbert] do, cannot escape from leaving Shakespeare suffering [...] from a leprous or cancerous taint, for they do not even attempt to show that he was lured into a trap, and if they did, he was too old for the excuse to be admitted as much palliation.<sup>36</sup>

In Chapter 4, I demonstrated how Butler believed that great artists, such as Bellini and Ferrari, improved as they aged, and that the morality of the artist is embodied in the work of art itself. Although he never attempts to date Shakespeare's

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<sup>36</sup> *SSR*, pp. 101–02. A similar association of homosexuality with bodily corruption and the social stigma of leprosy is found in one of the more colourful reviews of Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890). The reviewer for *The Daily Chronicle* complains that 'it is a tale spawned from the leprous literature of the French *Décadents* — a poisonous book, the atmosphere of which is heavy with the mephitic odours of moral and spiritual putrefaction'. Cited in Regenia Gagnier, *Idylls of the Marketplace: Oscar Wilde and the Victorian Public* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1986), p. 59.

entire oeuvre, and thus never shows that his later plays were superior to his earlier ones, this belief is intrinsic in his writings on the sonnets. Given the close linkage between morality and aesthetics, and given the deeply immoral episode which is elided but inferable from them, the younger Shakespeare is when he wrote them, the more room there is for his morality, and hence the aesthetic quality of his works to improve. Butler implies this when discussing the supposed ‘offence’:

The offence above indicated — a sin of very early youth — for which Shakespeare was bitterly penitent, and towards which not a trace of further tendency can be discerned in any subsequent sonnet or work [...] — this single offence is the utmost that can be brought against Shakespeare with a shadow of evidence in its support. (*SSR*, p. 83)

Butler thus exculpates Shakespeare from moral turpitude on the grounds of youth, allowing him to clear his later career from any ‘leprous or cancerous taint’, and thereby preparing a cleansed foundation for his assertion of Shakespeare’s genius.

In order to refute the Southampton theory, Butler falls back upon his strongly held belief in common sense and the literal, as opposed to the philosophical and the metaphorical. This preference may also account for his dislike of verse in general, and of Shakespeare’s two long poems, *The Rape of Lucrece* and *Venus and Adonis*, in particular, ‘as a medium of sustained expression’. In a notebook entry, he writes that

Versifying is the lowest form of poetry; and the last thing a great poet will do in these days is to write verses. I have been trying to read ‘Venus and Adonis’ and the ‘Rape of Lucrece’ but cannot get on with them. They teem with fine things, but they are got-up fine things [...]. If, then, the magic of Shakespeare’s name, let alone the great beauty of occasional passages, cannot reconcile us [...] to verse, and especially rhymed verse as a medium of sustained expression, what chance has any one else? It seems to me that a sonnet is the utmost length to which a rhymed poem should extend. (*NB*, p. 192)

Butler’s refutation of the Southampton theory turns on the correct interpretation of the phrase ‘onlie begetter’ in Thorpe’s dedication. ‘Beget’ is most commonly defined as to ‘father’ or ‘engender’, whereas its more unusual and archaic meaning is to ‘procure’ (*SSR*, pp. 29–31). In the former case, the dedication implies that W. H. inspired the sonnets, and was therefore the addressee too; in the latter, W. H. merely obtained the manuscript for Thorpe, and therefore could not reasonably be construed as being the addressee. I have noted earlier in this chapter how Butler favoured his own plain-style ‘Tottenham Court Road’ English in his translations of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, rather than the mock-archaic ‘Wardour Street’ English of Butcher’s and Lang’s translation.

Using striking imagery, ironically, Butler contrasts his method of translation with that of Butcher and Lang:

If you wish to preserve the spirit of a dead author, you must not skin him, stuff him, and set him up in a case. You must eat him, digest him, and let him live in you, with such life as you have, for better or worse. The difference between the Andrew Lang manner of translating the *Odyssey* and mine is that between making a mummy and a baby. He tries to preserve a corpse [...], whereas I try to originate a new life and one that is instinct (as far as I can effect this) with the spirit though not the form of the original. (*NB*, p. 197).

For the bachelor and childless Butler, it is very apparent in this passage how important it is for him to beget his own literary ‘babies’ in order to sustain his posthumous life via his literary works. He uses a very similar, but even more striking, language of assimilation in *Life and Habit*, and it will be useful to return again briefly to his conception of the continuity of personal identity between generations in order to understand his relationship with long dead authors and future readers, and, for the purposes of the present discussion, specifically between Shakespeare and Butler.

Discussing how a grain of corn, once eaten by a hen, ceases to remember being a grain, and becomes imbued with the personality and memory of the hen, Butler writes:

It was, doubtless, owing to the recognition of this fact, that some Eastern nations, as we are told by Herodotus, were in the habit of eating their deceased parents — for matter which has once been assimilated by any identity or personality becomes, for all practical purposes, part of the assimilating personality. (*LH*, p. 114)

Butler’s description of assimilating the sonnets also involves them becoming part of himself:

I would treat the Sonnets much as I had done the *Odyssey*, and as a preliminary measure began to commit them all to memory. By September 1898 I had them at my fingers’ ends, and have daily from that time repeated twenty-five of them, to complete the process of saturation. (*SSR*, p. xvii)

Just as the pianist becomes expert by the continuous repetition of a piece of music, so Butler’s understanding of the sonnets becomes deeper by daily repetition until he becomes saturated with them. They have become part of his memory, part of his ‘assimilating personality’. Becoming so, he is then able to himself ‘beget’ a new life of Shakespeare via the prose narrative of the period of his life as a youth, published as *Shakespeare’s Sonnets Reconsidered*.

Robert Macfarlane has traced the development of the usage of the word ‘assimilate’ over the nineteenth century. He argues that during the second half of the

century it had come to be synonymous with literary creation, and distinguished the legitimate use of earlier material from illegitimate plagiarism (Macfarlane, p. 118). Butler, too, uses the word in this sense, as a means to his own literary creation. But this is a creation engendered by a process akin to a secular Eucharist. And indeed, this process can be understood in relation to Butler's conception of God: 'God is the animal and vegetable world, and the animal and vegetable world is God' (*GK*, p. 31). By committing the sonnets to memory, he is also assimilating the spirit of Shakespeare.

*The Way of All Flesh* casts further light on Butler's conception of assimilation, where it is used synonymously with the beneficial action of crossing. After Ernest's breakdown, the doctor whom Overton consults recommends crossing:

'Crossing is the great medical discovery of the age. Shake him out of himself by shaking something else into him [...]. Seeing is a mode of touching, touching is a mode of feeding, feeding is a mode of assimilation, assimilation is a mode of re-creation and reproduction, and this is crossing — shaking yourself into something else and something else into you.' (*WF*, pp. 373–74)

The act of assimilation has now been expanded to include sensory experiences, and one can cross oneself with a better class of person simply by spending time with them. One of the means by which this crossing can be effected is by Ernest spending time abroad. Some time after a European trip with Overton, he travels alone, 'but only staying in those places where he found the inhabitants unusually good-looking and agreeable'. On his return, he looked 'so well favoured that it almost seemed as if he must have caught some good looks from the people among whom he had been living' (*WF*, p. 410). In contrast to the sexual crossing of domestic breeds by artificial selection, Ernest has improved himself by the asexual method of choosing to spend time with well-bred people.

This obviously has parallels with Butler's own life. After his return from New Zealand he spent several weeks of most years amongst Italians, primarily those of the Val Sesia and close to the Swiss border, where the inhabitants are 'above the average in respect of good looks and good breeding — and the average in those parts is a very high one' (*AS*, p. 214). Spending time with Italians, and thus crossing oneself with them, can only lead to improvement. It is notable that he emphasizes that Handel, his favourite composer, and Shakespeare both loved Italy too, and by implication, that their art benefited from their association with it. Of these artists he writes that:

It is always a pleasure to me to reflect that the countries dearest to these two master spirits are those which are also dearest to myself, I mean England and Italy [...]. Handel's music is the embodiment of all the best Italian

music of his time and before him, *assimilated* and *reproduced* with the enlargements and additions suggested by his own genius [...]. So also Shakespeare turned to Italy more than to any other country for his subjects. (AS, p. 2, emphasis added)

Although Butler never explicitly states this, one can infer that Shakespeare grew morally and artistically as his assimilation of Italian literature and culture increased, which is reflected in his later dramatic works, but which is absent from his very early sonnets.

Returning to the Southampton theory, Butler writes that it was originated by Nathan Drake in 1817 on the basis that 'beget' is understood to mean 'procure' rather than 'engender', an erroneous interpretation first suggested by George Chalmers in 1799 (SSR, p. 29). Butler makes an analogy between Chalmers and the sonnets and Wolf and the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*: 'The same thing happened to the Sonnets after Mr. Chalmers's paradox, as happened to the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* after Wolf had started his multiple-authorship theory on its long and mischievous career' (p. 37). In order to put forward the Southampton theory, Butler argues that it is necessary for Drake and later Southamptonites, including Butler's contemporary Sidney Lee, to define 'beget' as 'procure'. Using such a definition, the identities of Mr W. H. of the dedication and the addressee of the sonnets are different. Such a distortion of the definition need not be the case for the Pembroke theory, as Mr W. H. could refer to Pembroke, William Herbert. If the literal and commonsensical meaning is used, the dedication suggests that the sonnets were inspired by Mr W. H., who can thereby be comfortably accommodated as the principal addressee.

The second premise that Butler must demonstrate convincingly is that the sonnets are autobiographical, rather than a work deriving from Shakespeare's imagination. If the work is autobiographical, Butler can at least excuse Shakespeare on the grounds that he was the unwitting victim of a cruel practical joke; if, on the other hand, the episodes described and alluded to are creations of Shakespeare's imagination, there seem to be no mitigating circumstances. Their moral repugnancy is an accurate representation of the state of Shakespeare's mind. If this premise can be demonstrated, the 'impersonality' theory must be incorrect. This theory can also be refuted, according to Butler, if the usual meaning of 'beget' is applied, as this implies that someone, whoever that may be, must have inspired the sonnets.

Sidney Lee's belief in the sonnets' autobiographical veracity had dwindled following his intensive comparative study of sonnet sequences contemporary with

Shakespeare's, written 'under the incitement of that freakish rage for sonnetteering'.<sup>37</sup> He is able to exculpate Shakespeare from any charge of homosexuality by appealing to the conventionality of many features of the sequence, including 'the idealisation of a *protégé's* regard for a nobleman in the figurative language of amorous passion' (*A Life*, p. 159). Lee concludes that 'genuine emotion or the writer's personal experience very rarely inspired the Elizabethan sonnet', including those of Shakespeare, and that 'there is no proof that he is doing more in those sonnets than produce dramatically the illusion of a personal confession' (*A Life*, p. 159).

Lee could rationalize the impersonality theory on the grounds of poetic invention, of conformity with the conventions of the sonnet form, and could lose sight of any hint of homosexuality in the polysemic obscurity of Shakespeare's figurative language. This, however, is tantamount to a charge of insincerity in Butler's aesthetics. Those critics, such as Herbert Sussman, who read Butler's sometimes hyperbolic outrage at the heinous act Shakespeare is tricked into performing as an eloquent statement of Butler's own repressed homosexuality have failed to consider just how serious was a charge of insincerity in respect of the national poet, as I have demonstrated in Chapter 4. Moreover, given how general was the desire on the part of critics to exculpate Shakespeare from any taint of homosexuality, it is necessary to explain how Butler's defence differed from that of Sidney Lee and, earlier in the century, of Samuel Coleridge.

Unlike Lee, Coleridge read the sonnets as straightforwardly autobiographical, but argued that

I believe it possible that a man may, under certain states of the moral feeling, entertain something deserving the name of love towards a male object [...]. In Elizabeth's and James's time it seems to have been almost fashionable to cherish such a feeling; and perhaps we may account in some measure for it by considering how very inferior the women of that age, taken generally, were in education and accomplishment of mind to the men.<sup>38</sup>

So whereas Lee had explained away Sonnet 20, in which the addressee is described as 'the Master-Mistress of my passion', on the basis of an imitation on Shakespeare's part of a literary vogue, for Coleridge, it is a statement of the mores of early modern society. Butler, on the other hand, has to explain it as an isolated, youthful transgression: 'we may charitably suppose that he was too young fully to realize the detestable nature of his

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<sup>37</sup> Sidney Lee, *A Life of William Shakespeare* (London: Macmillan, 1899), p. 158.

<sup>38</sup> *The Table Talk and Omnia of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, Oxford edn (London: Oxford University Press, 1917), pp. 238–39.

own action' (*SSR*, p. 138). He does, however, close his book with an unexplained loose end, when he compares the love of Achilles and Patroclus in the *Iliad*, with that of Shakespeare and W. H. in the sonnets:

I cannot but be struck with the fact that it is in the two greatest of all poets that we find this subject [same-sex desire] treated with the greatest intensity of feeling. The marvel, however, is this; that whereas the love of Achilles for Patroclus depicted by the Greek poet is purely English, absolutely without taint or alloy of any kind, the love of the English poet for Mr. W. H. was, though only for a short time, more Greek than English. I cannot explain this. (p. 145)

Notwithstanding Butler's later elaboration of Shakespeare's crime as one merely of intent in his letter to Furnivall (see above), he distinguishes here between the wholesomely English non-sexual same-sex love of Achilles and Patroclus, and the 'Greek' sexual relationship between Shakespeare and W. H.

One of the charges Butler levels at Sidney Lee, in a reprise of his attack on Darwin, is that Lee amended his theory about the sonnets without drawing this change to the attention of his readers. In Lee's 1891 *Dictionary of National Biography* entry for William Herbert, Butler quotes him as claiming that 'nothing in the Sonnets directly contradicts the identification of W. H. their hero and "onlie begetter" with William Herbert, and many minute internal details directly confirm it' (*SSR*, p. 48). However, in his 1898 *Life of Shakespeare*, Lee writes that 'my conclusion is adverse to the claim of the sonnets to rank as autobiographical documents' (quoted in *SSR*, p. 51). Of course, between the dates of these two contradictory views were Oscar Wilde's trials in 1895 that led to his imprisonment for gross indecency. It may therefore have been prudent of Lee to de-emphasize the autobiographical origin of the sonnets, especially in light of the fact that Wilde's own literary works, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890) in particular, had been used as evidence for Wilde's immorality.<sup>39</sup>

### **Butler and Wilde**

I have found no evidence that Butler and Wilde knew each other personally, but they certainly had acquaintances in common, as I show below. At the time of the Wilde trials in 1895, Butler was in Turkey, examining the supposed site of the Trojan War, but his

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<sup>39</sup> 'Central Criminal Court, May 1', *The Times*, 2 May 1895, p. 3.

correspondence with Jones during this period contains innuendoes showing that Wilde's sexuality was a topic they had privately discussed. Jones writes that:

I suppose you have seen that [...] Oscar Wilde [is] to be tried again, the jury not agreeing. Tyrrell Paine told me that the trial took the form it did because the evidence was not what one might expect but something which you will understand if I say 69.<sup>40</sup>

In a letter to Jones, Butler uses the term 'Osc' to describe the mosquitoes that have bitten him in the night, suggesting a correspondence between the penetrating and sucking of the mosquito and, allegedly, of Wilde:

I have just killed the 3<sup>d</sup> Osc. wh[ich] I have seen this morning — it was full of my blood [...]. Went to bed about nine & slept well knowing nothing about the Oscs till this morning. You have doubtless coined this word already: I hope you like it.<sup>41</sup>

To which Jones replied: 'I like your letter of 3 May very much and Oscs is delightful. I did not realise it all at once but it dawned upon me by degrees.'<sup>42</sup> Alongside this, there is a cryptic pencil note, presumably added by Jones after Butler's death: 'Oscar Wilde was before the public. Butler used the first 3 letters of his name instead of the first 3 letters of another word which he silently treated as a synonym for Oscar.'

Although this brief exchange is hardly conclusive evidence that Butler was gay, it offers an insight into the intimate homosociality of his domestic life that is completely absent from Jones's *Memoir*. Couched in a private language that can never have been intended for publication at the point of its creation, it demonstrates the porosity of the generic boundaries between private and public forms of life writing. On the one hand we know that Butler spent at least the last ten years of his life editing, annotating, and destroying his private correspondence in order to fashion a favourable posthumous persona immanent within the public textual legacy he was to bequeath. In fact, he was doing so at the time that these letters discussing Wilde were written. Like the manuscript of *The Way of All Flesh*, his correspondence was to remain private whilst he lived, but had been prepared for posthumous publication. V. S. Pritchett described *The Way of All Flesh* as 'one of the great time bombs of literature': whilst private, the potentiality of publication always remains.<sup>43</sup> But the fact is that Butler, for whatever reason, did not destroy the letters discussing the Wilde trials before his death and so they, too, remained

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<sup>40</sup> London, British Library, Samuel Butler Papers, vol. IX, Add. MS 44035 (2 May [1895]).

<sup>41</sup> Butler Papers, vol. IX, Add. MS 44035 (3 May [1895]).

<sup>42</sup> Butler Papers, vol. IX, Add. MS 44035 (13 May [1895]).

<sup>43</sup> V. S. Pritchett, 'The Way of All Flesh: One of the Time Bombs of Literature', *New Statesman and Nation*, 12 December 1942, p. 392.



a time bomb. However, due to the editorial judgment of Jones and various literary executors, the time bomb never detonated as the brief exchange has never been published, presumably due to a desire to preserve a posthumous reputation free from the taint of homosexuality.

Of less speculative and more tangible interest with respect to Butler is Wilde's short story, 'The Portrait of Mr. W. H.' which was first published in *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* in 1889, and which has close parallels with Butler's later work on the sonnets. Given how scrupulous Butler usually was in acknowledging his sources, it is noteworthy that Wilde's story is never mentioned in *Shakespeare's Sonnets Reconsidered*. In 'The Portrait' the unnamed narrator recounts how his friend Erskine told him the story of Cyril Graham, who forged a portrait of Mr W. H. in order to provide ostensible evidence external to the sonnets themselves that their addressee was a beautiful and effeminate young actor called Willie Hughes. Erskine remembers Graham being effeminate too, and that he played female parts in Shakespeare's plays. Using purely internal evidence, Graham felt that he had solved the mystery of the sonnets. Quoting from Sonnet 25, he shows that the addressee could not have been of high birth. Butler, too, specifically mentions that 'the whole tenor of the sonnet [25] implies that both the writer and his friend lived in a sphere which was far removed from the incidents of rank and greatness' (*SSR*, p. 73). Graham's theory 'depend[ed] for its acceptance not so much on demonstrable proof or formal evidence, but of a kind of spiritual and artistic sense, by which alone he claimed could the true meaning of the poems be discerned'.<sup>44</sup> As did Butler, Graham deduced that the addressee's surname was Hughes from the pun on 'Hews' in Sonnet 20, which is capitalized and italicized in the 1609 edition. Erskine discovers by chance that Graham had commissioned the portrait from a poor artist called Edward Merton. The day after Erskine confronted Graham with his discovery, Graham was found dead, having shot himself. Following this suicide, the narrator, now convinced by the Willie Hughes theory, decides to continue with Graham's mission to make the theory public. The lacuna at the heart of Wilde's story is, not surprisingly, that at the heart of Butler's work too. The narrator confesses that 'I did not care to pry into the mystery of [Hughes's] sin' (Wilde, 'Portrait', p. 15).

After spending three weeks thinking about the sonnets, the narrator writes to Erskine to tell him that he is convinced that Graham's theory is sound. In a sentence

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<sup>44</sup> Oscar Wilde, 'The Portrait of Mr. W. H.', *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, July 1889, pp. 1–21 (p. 6).

remarkably consonant with Butler's project of the recuperation of neglected figures, he confesses that 'it seemed to me that I was not merely restoring Cyril Graham to his proper place in literary history, but rescuing the honour of Shakespeare himself from the tedious memory of a commonplace intrigue' (p. 18). But curiously, once he has written this letter, his belief in the Willie Hughes theory dissipates. Conversely, the erstwhile sceptic, Erskine, is in turn converted by the narrator's argument. Two years later, the narrator receives a letter from Erskine that tells him that by the time he has received it, Erskine would have killed himself for the sake of Willie Hughes and Graham. The narrator rushes to Cannes, where Erskine is staying, only to find that Erskine had died two days earlier, not, however, from suicide, but from consumption. He bequeathed the narrator the portrait of Mr W. H. which now hangs in the narrator's library.

Given Butler's familiarity with periodical literature, and the meticulous research he carried out before writing his book on the sonnets, it seems almost inconceivable that he was unaware of Wilde's earlier short story. Below I offer some external, albeit circumstantial, evidence in support of this claim. There is, however, a more interesting coda, which may suggest that Butler's borrowing from Wilde was more extensive than the above account would suggest.

In 1921, there was published for the first time a longer version of 'The Portrait of Mr. W. H.', based upon a manuscript written by Wilde in the early to mid-1890s. There is one striking similarity between this and Butler's account that is worth highlighting. As outlined above, Butler had reordered the sonnets in order to construct a more coherent linear narrative of a period in the young Shakespeare's life. In particular, he disagreed with the conventional splitting of them into the 'fair youth' and 'dark lady' sonnets. Of the twenty-six sonnets apparently addressed to the dark lady, he inserts sixteen of them between sonnets 39 and 40, explaining the intercalation thus: 'Shakespeare, unable to induce his friend to marry, and indignant that he should continue to be so unappreciative of the charms of woman, resolved to bring his own mistress and his friend together' (*SSR*, p. 86). In the longer 1921 version of 'The Portrait', Wilde's narrator performs an almost identical reordering:

[The 'dark lady' sonnets] were obviously printed out of their proper place and should have been inserted between Sonnets XXXIII and XL. Psychological and artistic changes necessitated this change, a change which

I hope will be adopted by all future editors, as without it an entirely false impression is conveyed of the nature and issue of this noble friendship.<sup>45</sup>

Later, he concludes that ‘my whole scheme of the Sonnets was now complete, and, by placing those that refer to the dark lady in their proper order and position, I saw the perfect unity and completeness of the whole’ (Wilde, *Portrait* (1921), p. 102).

In *The True History of Shakespeare’s Sonnets*, Lord Alfred Douglas relies heavily on Butler’s theory, writing that ‘except for one fatal blemish, [Butler’s work] is the most valuable and honest book that has ever been written on the subject’ (p. 15). Douglas makes it clear that Butler’s ‘fatal blemish’ is to impute a charge of homosexuality against Shakespeare, whereas Wilde never did. Douglas himself ‘utterly rejects the notion that Shakespeare was a homosexualist’ (pp. 18–19). He speculates as to why Butler never acknowledged Wilde’s *Blackwood’s* article. He may never have read it. However, ‘it is far more likely that Butler had read it and that he omitted to mention Wilde because at that time (within four years of his conviction), nobody in England mentioned him if he could avoid it’ (p. 18).

Moreover, Richard Garnett, Butler’s friend, dedicatee of *Unconscious Memory*, and librarian at the British Museum, had written to Wilde following the publication of the 1889 *Blackwood’s* article, ‘congratulat[ing] him very warmly on his “brilliant piece of Shakespearian criticism” and [saying] in effect, ‘I more than half-believe that you have actually solved the secret of the Sonnets”’ (Douglas, pp. 33–34). A decade later, Garnett also commented on Butler’s theory, and, given that Butler did all his writing in the Reading Room of the British Museum, it seems unlikely that Garnett was unaware until after publication that Butler was working on the sonnets; and therefore likely that Garnett would have mentioned Wilde’s *Blackwood’s* article. Interestingly, however, despite the similarity between the theories of Butler and Wilde, Garnett disagreed strongly with Butler’s Willie Hughes idea (Jones, *Memoir*, II, 307–09). Again, this may be more evidence of the marked change in climate following the Wilde trials in 1895, and of Garnett’s distancing himself from a theory associated with Wilde.

There is other, more circumstantial, evidence that Butler was aware of Wilde’s *Blackwood’s* article, and, intriguingly, that he may have even been aware of Wilde’s longer version. Wilde had commissioned the artist Charles Ricketts to paint a portrait of Mr W. H. for the frontispiece of the book version of his article. In the spring of 1899, some months before Butler sent his manuscript to the printer, he and Jones met and

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<sup>45</sup> Oscar Wilde, *The Portrait of Mr W. H.* (New York: Mitchell Kennerley, 1921), p. 82.

talked with Ricketts and his partner, Charles Shannon, at a hotel in Venice, when, according to Ricketts they discussed the sonnets: '[Butler] had interesting views on Shakespeare's sonnets, declaring them to be quite early'.<sup>46</sup>

Several of Butler's biographers have speculated, more or less explicitly, about Butler's possible homosexuality, and they often cite his work on the sonnets as evidence, just as Wilde's works were brought in evidence against him. Malcolm Muggeridge asserts that Butler's 'homosexuality was more psychological than physiological', and that he 'credited Shakespeare with sexual impulses as timid as his own'. P. N. Furbank notes the similarities between Butler and Wilde in the face of their obvious differences. He gestures towards Butler's possible homosexuality in the concluding sentence of his book: 'A concealed life, a resolute refusal of tragedy by a character naturally inclined to it: such, perhaps, in that age, and for that temperament, was the one available alternative to the fatal choice of Wilde.' Peter Raby comments that 'when Butler writes about homosexual acts, his language [...] seems stronger than his argument requires, as though he is deliberately protecting himself from possible criticism'. Butler's argument, according to Elinor Shaffer, 'was undoubtedly a gesture of solidarity with Oscar Wilde'. Herbert Sussman has gone much further, asserting that Butler 'out[ed] himself' in his reworking of Wilde's 'Portrait'.<sup>47</sup>

Whatever the truth about Butler's sexuality, of more interest is the extent to which Wilde and his 'Portrait' are excluded from the genealogy of *Shakespeare's Sonnets Reconsidered*. The text and the author are inseparable. Using the terms of 'Lucubratio Ebria', the text is an 'extracorporaneous limb' of the author, which, in Lamarckian fashion, is 'begot' by the procreation of the will of the author and earlier texts. Both author and text have genealogies of their own, and for Butler it is necessary that both are the products of good breeding. In a kind of reverse eugenics, this led to an acknowledgement of the inheritance of the ideas in Edmond Malone's 1780 edition of the sonnets, when the 'Willie Hughes' theory was first suggested, and the elision of the more recent but less wholesome Wildean version. Likewise, it was necessary for Butler

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<sup>46</sup> Jones, *Memoir*, II, 303; Letter to Cecil Lewis [1926], quoted in *Self-Portrait: Taken from the Letters & Journals of Charles Ricketts, R. A.*, ed. by Cecil Lewis (London: Davies, 1939), p. 363. In April 1900, after Butler's book was published, Butler and Wilde were in Rome and then Sicily at the same time. See Owen Dudley Edwards, 'Wilde, Oscar Fingal O'Flahertie Wills (1854–1900)', *ODNB* <doi:10.1093/ref:odnb/29400>; *The Complete Letters of Oscar Wilde*, ed. by Merlin Holland and Rupert Hart-Davis (London: Fourth Estate, 2000), p. 1178 (2 April [1900]); Jones, *Memoir*, II, 327.

<sup>47</sup> Muggeridge, p. 129; P. N. Furbank, *Samuel Butler (1835–1902)* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1948), pp. 111–13, p. 113; Raby, p. 273; Elinor Shaffer, 'Butler, Samuel (1835–1902)', *ODNB* <doi:10.1093/ref:odnb/32217>; Sussman, 'Samuel Butler as Late-Victorian Bachelor', p. 185.

to construct his own respectable genealogical line in textual form. Given the contempt with which he viewed his father, this meant that he had to go back another generation and write the hagiographic *Life and Letters* of his grandfather, Dr Samuel Butler; the wholesome and worthy life constructed from his judicious selection of letters, and the destruction of those that would taint it. This back-formation of a respectable line of inheritance is the mirror image of Butler's attempt to construct his own posthumous life through his various books and, perhaps more importantly, via his heavily edited notebooks and letters with their marginalia of justificatory clarifications.

## Conclusion

For Butler, the shade of one's posthumous reputation was his secular alternative to an eternity of heavenly bliss or infernal damnation, and his literary self-fashioning was calculated to guarantee him the former. As a result, there is little extant textual evidence that Butler and Jones moved within homosexual as opposed to homosocial circles; or, at least, if any survived the culling of correspondence it lies deep within the unpublished archive. This careful self-fashioning notwithstanding, Butler was included in a canon of gay writers that E. M. Forster listed in his private notebook at the end of 1907, together with Walter Pater, John Addington Symonds, Walt Whitman, and Edward Carpenter.<sup>1</sup> In a recent history of gay New Zealand, Butler's homosexuality is taken for granted, rather than being an issue to be established.<sup>2</sup> There is, however, more concrete evidence of Jones's connections with private gay coteries after Butler's death. P. N. Furbank has noted that 'Festing Jones had written to [Forster] in praise of *Howard's End* [published in 1910] and had had "incredible" things to relate about Butler'. To which Furbank has added the footnote, 'presumably about his sex-life, which seems — in part anyway — to have been homosexual'.<sup>3</sup> J. R. Ackerley (1896–1967), whose mentor was Forster, had spent some time in the court of a homosexual maharajah in India, and his diary of this time had been circulating privately. Jones wrote enthusiastically: 'I want to see your snapshots of all your people, and to ask you lots of questions the answers to which are, I daresay, unpublishable'.<sup>4</sup> Given Forster's position within the Bloomsbury circle it seems likely that Butler's apparent homosexuality was an open secret within it.

Virginia Woolf famously remarked that 'on or about December 1910 human character changed', and goes on to elaborate: 'the first signs of [this change] are recorded in the books of Samuel Butler, in *The Way of All Flesh* in particular; the plays of Bernard Shaw continue to record it'.<sup>5</sup> In Chapter 4, I noted the influence of Butler's prose translation of the *Odyssey* and *The Authoress of Odyssey* on James Joyce and *Ulysses*.

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<sup>1</sup> Wendy Moffat, 'E. M. Forster and the Unpublished "Scrapbook" of Gay History: "Lest We Forget Him!"', *English Literature in Transition, 1880–1920*, 55 (2012), 19–31 (p. 25). P. N. Furbank has distinguished between the writer who is gay, and someone who writes about homosexuality, and that Butler's inclusion in Forster's gay canon was almost certainly due to the former (personal communication). This seems likely, and corroborates my view that Butler went out of his way to leave a textual legacy free from any explicit taint of homosexuality.

<sup>2</sup> Chris Brickell, *Mates and Lovers: A History of Gay New Zealand* (Auckland, NZ: Godwit, 2008).

<sup>3</sup> P. N. Furbank, *E. M. Forster: A Life*, 2 vols (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), II, 3–4.

<sup>4</sup> Peter Parker, *Ackerley: A Life of J. R. Ackerley* (London: Cardinal, 1989), p. 158.

<sup>5</sup> 'Character in Fiction', in Virginia Woolf, *Selected Essays*, ed. by David Bradshaw (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), pp. 37–54 (p. 38).

Although it would be too ambitious to claim that Butler's sexual orientation was the foundation of his attractively subversive authority within Bloomsbury and amongst the modernists, I would nevertheless suggest that the issue of his sexuality is paradigmatic of his broader outsider status and his appeal to the Edwardians, at least until the publication of Jones's *Memoir* in 1919. Moreover, it also demonstrates the difficulty in policing the boundary between the private and the public. At a time when one inappropriate text message or an injudicious tweet can instantaneously discolour a reputation built over years, we are accustomed to the treacherous osmosis of the private into the public realm. For all Butler's sedulous self-fashioning, the hue of his posthumous reputation was in part outside his control, contingent upon the survival and recoverability of private letters, or the textual recording of fleeting memories in the biographies of others. In other words, his reputation was as much the product of luck, as it was of his cunning. He was also very aware that interpretation and judgment ultimately resided with the reader. As he had urged in the preface to *The Fair Haven*: 'I am not responsible for the interpretations of my readers. It is only natural that the same work should present a very different aspect according as it is approached from one side or the other' (*FH*, p. xxii). Therefore, at the same time as he was attempting to control the meaning ascribed to his posthumous life, he also recognized his impotence in doing so, as his inclusion in Forster's gay canon just five years after his death demonstrates. Although I have dwelt on the issue of Butler's sexual orientation, the important point to note is that, for my purposes, this is merely illustrative of his strenuous attempts to impose an authoritative reading upon his life and reputation, and to prevent his identification as part of a gay coterie.<sup>6</sup>

After Butler's death, what control there was over his reputation was in the hands of his literary executor, Richard Streatfeild. The literary executor stands in a position of surrogate parent to posthumously published texts, and can therefore potentially play an important role in fashioning the posthumous life of the testator. On the death of Streatfeild's successor, A. T. Bartholomew, in 1933, Geoffrey Keynes was appointed (jointly with Brian Hill), at the request of Jones whom Keynes had met through Bartholomew.<sup>7</sup> This assumption of the joint-executorship by Keynes provides a fascinating coda to Butler's entanglements with the Darwins, and to his posthumous

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<sup>6</sup> Butler's posthumous self-fashioning is the mirror-image of Forster's, who actively sought to leave his own gay legacy, arranging for the publication of his novel *Maurice*, as well as of a frank biography, both posthumously. See Moffat, pp. 20–21.

<sup>7</sup> Geoffrey Keynes, *The Gates of Memory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), p. 62.

connection with Bloomsbury. Keynes was married to Margaret Darwin, granddaughter of Charles, and daughter of George Darwin.<sup>8</sup> He was also brother of John Maynard Keynes, who had been recruited into the Apostles society as an undergraduate at Cambridge by Lytton Strachey and Leonard Woolf, and whose members included E. M. Forster.<sup>9</sup> As joint-executor, Geoffrey Keynes earned royalties on the first-year sale of 400,000 copies of the new edition of *The Way of All Flesh* before the copyright expired (Keynes, *Gates of Memory*, p. 62). Having made a substantial net loss on the publication of his books in his lifetime, Butler would have noted the grim irony of such financial gains from the sale of one of his books accruing to a family member of the Darwins.

David Amigoni has noted ‘the call for biographical writing in the late nineteenth century to become disinterested and professionalised’, which was exemplified by the emergence of John Morley’s ‘English Men of Letters Series’ and the *Dictionary of National Biography* under the editorship of Leslie Stephen.<sup>10</sup> The objectivity associated with the professional biographer legitimated itself in relation to the partial family biographer. Biography, therefore, was part of the broader shift towards professionalism that Butler had spent most of his life tilting at, and towards the ostensible objectivity championed by scientific naturalism. However, as Butler also demonstrated, this objectivity was a sham, put into service as an authorizing quality by a variety of non-scientific disciplines. Both professional and family biographers were subject to pressures to suppress or encode culturally unacceptable details of the life of the subject. Before Jones’s *Memoir* was published, Butler was included in the *Dictionary of National Biography* in 1912, the entry written by Thomas Seccombe, who had also written that of Oscar Wilde in 1901, soon after Wilde’s death.<sup>11</sup> The entry conforms to the generic conventions of the *DNB*, the only decoding needed being a reference to Butler’s nightly visits to Jones’s rooms in Staple Inn, ‘for the study of music’. In *The Fair Haven*, the messiness of John Owen’s literary remains on his death, and their ordering by his brother William into the coherent narrative of his ‘Memoir’ attest to the important role played by the partial family member in fashioning a posthumous life. As the partial family biographer, Butler

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<sup>8</sup> David McKitterick, ‘Keynes, Sir Geoffrey Langdon (1887–1982)’, rev. by Stephen Lock, *ODNB* <doi:10.1093/ref:odnb/31310>.

<sup>9</sup> Alec Cairncross, ‘Keynes, John Maynard, Baron Keynes (1883–1946)’, *ODNB* <doi:10.1093/ref:odnb/34310>.

<sup>10</sup> ‘Introduction’, in *Life Writing and Victorian Culture*, ed. by David Amigoni (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), pp. 1–19 (p. 14).

<sup>11</sup> Thomas Seccombe, ‘Butler, Samuel (1835–1902)’, *ODNB* <<http://0-www.oxforddnb.com.catalogue.ulrls.lon.ac.uk/view/olddnb/32217>> [accessed 14 September 2012].



admits to destroying some of his grandfather's letters without publication. In similar fashion, Jones provides a very selective representation of Butler's life in his *Memoir*.

This selection process is central to Butler's aesthetics (see Chapter 4), and is also explicit in Lytton Strachey's description of the duties of the biographer: 'to preserve [...] a brevity which excludes everything that is redundant and nothing that is significant', and 'to maintain his own freedom of spirit.'<sup>12</sup> In the preface to *Eminent Victorians*, Strachey mocks the traditional Victorian Life and Letters, 'those two fat volumes, with which it is our custom to commemorate the dead [...] with their ill-digested masses of material, their slipshod style, their tone of tedious panegyric, their lamentable lack of selection, of detachment, of design' (p. 10). Strachey goes on to declare that his own aims in *Eminent Victorians* are 'to lay bare the facts of some cases, as I understand them, dispassionately, impartially, and without ulterior intentions' (p. 10). But here we see the central paradox that Butler identified and confronted head on throughout his works. On the one hand, it is the duty of the biographer to select only those aspects of the subject that are, in some undefined way, significant. On the other, the biographer should efface themselves in the laying bare of the facts. For Butler, Thomas Nagel's 'view from nowhere' is an impossibility.<sup>13</sup>

If modernists applaud Butler for facilitating what amounts to the *ad hominem* dismantling of the 'pretenses of eminent Victorians' in *The Way of All Flesh*, it is noteworthy that they are conveniently silent on Butler's biography of his grandfather, which conforms to the very two-volume Life and Letters that Strachey had rejected (Hoberman, pp. 21–22). Furthermore, Butler took as a model for his grandfather's biography Arthur Stanley's *Life and Correspondence* of Dr Thomas Arnold, headmaster of Rugby. Arnold, it will be remembered, was one of Strachey's eminent Victorians whose two-volume life was shrunk to less than forty pages. Jones's *Memoir* was published only one year after *Eminent Victorians*. Despite its title, it includes a large selection of Butler's correspondence, and is, to all intents and purposes, a conventional nineteenth-century two-volume Life and Letters. Ironically, the publication of this work marked the beginning of the long decline in Butler's reputation.

In the Appendix I have included a chart that records the number of articles and books written about or mentioning Butler for each year from his death until 1952, as recorded in Breuer and Parsell's *Annotated Bibliography* of writings about Butler. The main

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<sup>12</sup> Lytton Strachey, *Eminent Victorians*, intr. by Michael Holroyd (London: Penguin, 1986), p. 10.

<sup>13</sup> Thomas Nagel, *The View from Nowhere* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986).

points to note are that following his death in 1902 and the publication of *The Way of All Flesh* in 1903, there was a decline in interest until the publication of his *Notebooks* in 1912. The ensuing peak was followed by a few years of lower interest until the publication of the *Memoir* in 1919, which resulted in the highest number of articles and books published about Butler in any single year. There was a minor peak from 1923 to 1926, coinciding with the publication of the twenty-volume Shrewsbury Edition of his collected works, another one in 1935, being the centenary of his birth, and finally one in 1950, when a new edition of *The Way of All Flesh* was published.

Of course, this quantitative data tells us nothing of the qualitative tenor of the articles, but the apogee of critical interest in Butler in 1919 also seems to mark the turning point in Butler's reputation, as details of his life were made public for the first time, a correlation noted by Philip Cohen.<sup>14</sup> Just as Butler had read between the lines of the *Odyssey* and Shakespeare's sonnets in order to infer the identity or character of their authors, so too did readers of the *Memoir*. By filling in the lacunae and stripping bare the periphrases of Jones's monumental work, the reader was able to construct for themselves a very different Butler from that which he had intended to fashion for himself. Whilst this did not necessarily involve any imputation of his sexuality, it did reconstruct a character far less attractively subversive than that imagined before the *Memoir*. Cohen summarizes the composite portrait drawn of Butler by reviewers of the *Memoir*: 'a dogmatic bigot, an unsociable Ishmaelite, a great hater, an affection-starved man, often mentally obtuse, and his work, the reviewers felt, was substantially marred because it was the product of such a personality' (p. 70).

It is well known that George Bernard Shaw wrote approvingly of Butler's ideas in several of the prefaces to his plays.<sup>15</sup> In his 1915 review of Gilbert Cannan's critical study of Butler, Shaw explains why he believes Butler to be 'a man of genius' and approvingly recounts conversations with Butler shortly before his death.<sup>16</sup> However, in his 1919 review of the *Memoir*, the accent is less on the genius and more on the character. Although he was very courteous and considerate in private, 'Butler's public manners were atrocious.' Shaw goes on to confess that 'ardent Butlerite as I am, I cannot deny that Butler brought a great deal of his unpopularity on himself by his country parsonage

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<sup>14</sup> Philip Cohen, 'Stamped on His Works: The Decline of Samuel Butler's Literary Reputation', *Journal of the Midwest Modern Language Association*, 18 (1985), 64–81 (p. 64).

<sup>15</sup> See, for example, the prefaces to *Major Barbara* (1905) and *Androcles and the Lion* (1916), in Bernard Shaw, *Prefaces* (London: Constable, 1934), pp. 122, 565.

<sup>16</sup> 'Mr. Gilbert Cannan on Samuel Butler', *New Statesman*, 8 May 1915, pp. 109–10; repr. in *Pen Portraits and Reviews*, Standard edition (London: Constable, 1949), pp. 64–71 (pp. 65, 67).

unsociability and evangelical bigotry'.<sup>17</sup> In a similar vein, Ernest Newman, the very Butlerian pseudonym of William Roberts, described how he came to dislike Butler after reading the *Memoir*.<sup>18</sup> Nevertheless, unlike Butler, Shaw was able to resolve the harmonics of the life and the letters into its component parts, and evaluate the latter with the distanced objectivity of the scientific ideal, rather than conflate them with the life as Butler had done, and which resulted in the *ad hominem* invective Butler had aimed at Darwin. Even after his damning reassessment of Butler's character in his 1919 review of the *Memoir*, Shaw was still able to praise his Lamarckian ideas in the preface to *Back to Methuselah* (1921), noting also that Butler 'attacked Darwin's personal character, unable to bear the fact that the author of so abhorrent a doctrine was an amiable and upright man' (*Prefaces*, p. 501).

The decline in Butler's reputation was exacerbated by his association with Lamarckism. A broad acceptance of this theory had always been hindered by the lack of supporting experimental evidence. Lamarckism was almost totally eclipsed in the 1920s, within experimental biology at least, by a resurgent Darwinism, which was buoyed by a deeper appreciation of the consequences of Mendelism, and by Paul Kammerer's apparent fraud perpetrated in his attempt to adduce evidence for the transmission of acquired characteristics. In 1926, six weeks after the publication of an article in *Nature* that charged Kammerer with tampering with his specimens of midwife toads, Kammerer shot himself.<sup>19</sup> Butler's association with a discredited theory notwithstanding, Karl Popper was able to declare over seventy years after Butler's death that he was 'somewhat unimpressed by most of the evolutionary philosophers; with the one great exception, that is, of Samuel Butler'.<sup>20</sup> Popper regarded Butler as the first writer to articulate clearly the real difficulty faced by Darwin's theory of evolution: how could the countless tiny random variations by which a complex organ such as the eye has evolved all have had a survival value? Or, in Butler's terms, how could an eye develop by luck, rather than by cunning?<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> 'Samuel Butler: The New Life Reviewed', *Manchester Guardian*, 1 November 1919; repr. in *Pen Portraits and Reviews*, pp. 52–64 (pp. 55, 56).

<sup>18</sup> 'The Sad Case of Samuel Butler', *Musical Opinion*, April 1920, pp. 541–42. Roberts had written a defence of Oscar Wilde in 1895. See Laurel Brake, 'The Deaths of Heroes: Biography, Obits and the Discourse of the Press, 1890–1900', in *Life Writing and Victorian Culture*, ed. by Amigoni, pp. 165–94 (p. 189).

<sup>19</sup> Peter J. Bowler, *The Eclipse of Darwinism: Anti-Darwinian Evolution Theories in the Decades around 1900* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1983), pp. 98–100.

<sup>20</sup> Karl Popper, *Unended Quest: An Intellectual Autobiography* (Glasgow: Fontana, 1977), p. 167.

<sup>21</sup> Karl Popper, *Objective Knowledge: An Evolutionary Approach* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), pp. 269–70.

Any engagement with Butler's work forces us to address the questions of how and what we are able to know, how this knowledge comes to be culturally authorized, and how this authority is appropriated by or conferred upon certain carefully self-fashioned individuals, as Butler had believed in the case of Darwin. If twenty-first-century classicists believe Butler to be misguided in interpreting the world of the *Odyssey* through the lens of late-Victorian England, what lens at the time would have discovered a more academically acceptable view? And how would this lens be cleared of any presentist filter in order to offer a more objective view? If we deny that our criticism is inflected with the concerns and standards of the present, then we must be clear as to exactly what critical standard we are using and why it has been chosen over the alternatives. If we admit to being presentist, we must explain why our twenty-first-century presentism is more valid than Butler's, an explanation that must in turn expose one to charges of Whiggish triumphalism. Butler would argue that we could no more efface the present than we can the self. But of course this does not mean that all subjectivities and all presentisms are equally valid. Butler's presentism, in fact, was in harmonic relation with his universalism. Although he denied the possibility of absolute truth, neither was his relativism absolute. As has been noted several times in this thesis, the universal standard by which Butler measured his actions — 'the court of last appeal' — was that of the common man with good looks, good health, and a kindly disposition, accumulated over centuries of good breeding, and who possessed the ability to acquire, assimilate, and bequeath all that was best in their cultural environment. This was the nature of the Ydgrunite superego overseeing his work. This was Butler's ideal reader to whom he appealed in his quest for posthumous fame. It was at once timeless yet always in harmony with the shifts of time.

It has not helped Butler's cause that this ideal reader is the antithesis of his construction of the professional within academia who is most likely to read his work today and who is best placed to raise his posthumous reputation. Butler included academia within his broad category of 'professional' whose members purported to offer disinterestedly authoritative views but were driven rather by naked ambition, trafficking in hypocrisies and *ad hominem* arguments, and blinded by self-deception. It is such a charge that can make Butler so uncomfortable to read and yet so useful if we reduce the heat of his rhetoric. He asks us to think honestly about all cultural artefacts and their creators. To take a contemporary example: is the downward shift in critical reception of the novels of Martin Amis due to some dispassionately judged decline in the quality of

his recent works, or is it because Martin Amis the novelist is increasingly seen as misogynistic, classist, and anti-Islamist.<sup>22</sup> Is it still possible to judge separately the author and the work? Similarly, is the academic neglect of Butler due to the fact that most of his ideas have proved to be wrong, or because the author behind these ideas appears to be so objectionable and antagonistic towards his professional academic reader?

Towards the end of his life, Butler wrote what amounts to a brutally honest epitaph for himself, in which he foregrounds his moral crusade rather than any intellectual contribution he may have made:

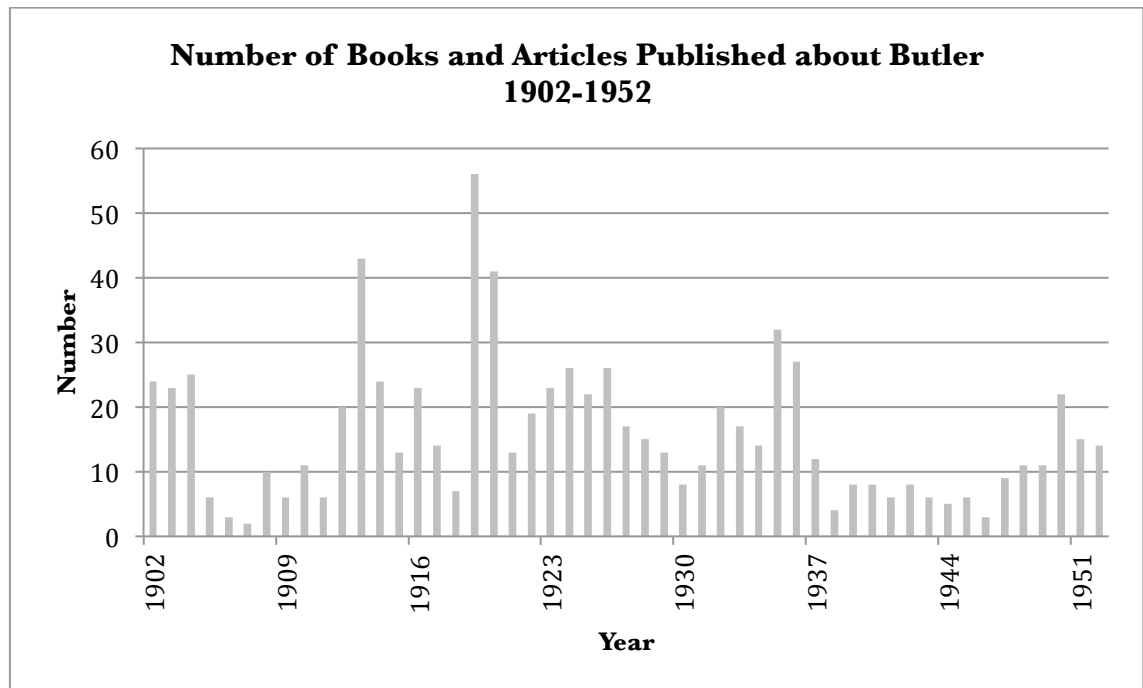
If I deserve to be remembered, it will be not so much for anything I have written, or for any new way of looking at old facts which I may have suggested, as for having shown that a man of no special ability, with no literary connections, not particularly laborious, fairly, but not supremely, accurate as far as he goes, and not travelling far either for his facts or from them, may yet, by being perfectly square, sticking to his point, not letting his temper run away with him, and biding his time, be a match for the most powerful literary and scientific coterie that England has ever known. I hope it may be said of me that I discomfited an unscrupulous, self-seeking clique, and set a more wholesome example myself. To have done this is the best of all discoveries. (*NB*, p. 376)

Butler was only partly satisfied in the hopes for his afterlife. He has been remembered for what he wrote, but not for the reasons he would have desired. He is held up as a negative exemplar of how not to do classics; he backed the wrong horse in the evolutionary debates; his connoisseurial art criticism has been proved to be only partially correct; and his biblical criticism was derivative rather than original. We may also quibble with his assertion that the clique he set out to discomfit was unscrupulous and self-seeking, or even that it was discomfited; and we may perhaps balk at the idea of Butler's wholesomeness. But if he makes the modern reader squirm uneasily when confronted with their most shameless acts of self-fashioning, if his outing of professional cant serves to sensitize our modern day spin detectors, his legacy has not been entirely lost.

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<sup>22</sup> See, for instance, Adam Mars-Jones, 'Anti-Dad', *London Review of Books*, 21 June 2012, pp. 3–8; and an account of Terry Eagleton's very public spat with Amis: 'Terry Eagleton on Martin Amis', *Verso UK's Blog* <<http://versouk.wordpress.com/2010/02/24/terry-eagleton-on-martin-amis/>> [accessed 14 September 2012].

## Appendix



Source: *Samuel Butler: An Annotated Bibliography of Writings About Him*, ed. by Hans-Peter Breuer and Roger Parsell (New York: Garland Publishing, 1990).

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